

KINGS
IN
EXILE



DAUDET

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Kings in Exile

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Alphonse Daudet

Kings in Exile



Translated by Laura Ensor
and E. Bartow

London
J. M. Dent and Co.

1896

Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & Co.
At the Ballantyne Press

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TO

EDMOND DE GONCOURT,

WHO HAS WRITTEN

THE HISTORY OF QUEENS AND FAVOURITES, AND

THE ROMANCE OF "GERMINIE LACERTEUX,"

AND THE "FRÈRES ZEMGANNO,"

I dedicate,

WITH THE SINCEREST ADMIRATION,

THIS ROMANCE OF MODERN HISTORY.

ALPHONSE DAUDET.

684599





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I.

THE FIRST DAY.

FREDÉRIQUE had been sleeping since the early morning,—a fevered and weary slumber, haunted by the grievous, mournful dreams of an exiled and dethroned queen, a slumber still agitated by the tumult and anguish of two months' siege, full of warlike and blood-stained visions, broken by sobs, shudders and nervous prostration, from which she started up with a feeling of terror.

“Zara? Where is Zara?” she exclaimed.

One of her women came forward, and gently re-

assured her, H.R.H. the Comte de Zara was quietly asleep in his room ; Madame Eléonore was with him.

“ And where is the king ? ”

He had gone out at noon in one of the carriages belonging to the hotel.

“ What, alone ? ”

No. His Majesty was accompanied by the councillor Boscovich. By degrees, as she listened to the servant's Dalmatian dialect, clear and hard like the sound of shingle rolling on a beach, the queen felt her fears vanish, and little by little the peaceful hotel room she had vaguely caught sight of on arriving in the early dawn, revealed itself to her with all its reassuring and luxurious triviality, with its light hangings, tall mirrors, and soft-coloured carpets on which the silent and rapid flight of the swallows fell in shadows through the blinds, mingling together like the wings of huge night-moths.

“ Already five o'clock ! Come Petscha, do my hair quickly, I am ashamed at having slept so long.”

Five o'clock had struck ; it was the finest summer's day of the year 1872 that had as yet brightened up Paris, and when the queen stepped on to the long balcony which stretched along the fifteen windows of the *Hotel des Pyramides*, shaded by pink canvas,

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situated in the very finest position of the Rue de Rivoli, she was lost in admiration.

Below, in the wide thoroughfare, the sounds of wheels mingled with the gentle sprinkle of the watering, as an uninterrupted line of carriages flowed onwards in the direction of the Bois de Boulogne, amid a glitter of harness and a profusion of light dresses, dashing by in a whirlwind of speed. Then from the throng pressing round the gilded gates of the Tuileries, the fascinated gaze of the queen wandered to the bright medley of white frocks, fair locks, gaudy coloured silks, and joyous games ; towards all the childish bustle that on a sunny day pervades the terraces of the great Parisian garden ; and from these she caught sight of the charming canopy of greenery, the immense round leafy dome of the chestnut trees which sheltered at that moment a military band, and quivered with the delighted screams of the children and the clang of the brass instruments. The bitter rancour of the exiled queen gradually subsided at the sight of the surrounding happiness, a sensation of warmth and comfort seemed to envelop her like a silken web ; her cheeks, wan and paled by privation and night-watching, once more assumed a life-like hue, as she thought, “ Ah ! how charming and peaceful ! ”

The greatest misfortunes have such moments of sudden and unconscious relief, caused not by persons,

but by the thousand-tongued eloquence of things. No human speech could have brought consolation to this despoiled queen thrown into exile with husband and child, by one of those upheavings of the people, which, like earthquakes, open yawning abysses and fiery volcanoes. Her low and haughty brow still seemed to bear the weight of one of Europe's noblest crowns ; and now, it is Nature in

the fresh joyousness of a marvellous Parisian summer that brings her soothing thoughts of hope and encouragement. As she greedily feasts her eyes

on the green-clad horizon and a gentle calm steals over her, lulling her exhausted nerves, the exile suddenly starts and shudders. At her left, yonder, at the entrance of the garden rises a spectral monument with blackened walls, scorched columns, crumbled roof, gaping holes filled with blue space instead of windows, an open-worked façade on a perspective of ruins ; and, at the furthest end—overlooking the Seine—one remaining pavilion, almost untouched, scorched only by





the flames that have blackened the railings of its balconies. It is all that remains of the Palace of the Tuileries.



The sight filled her with deep emotion and stunned her as though she had fallen prostrate on those stones. Ten years ago, no, not even ten—by what unlucky and seemingly prophetic chance had

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she happened to lodge in front of these ruins—she had resided there with her husband. It was in the spring of 1864.

Only three months married, the Comtesse de Zara was then visiting the allied Courts, in all the pride of her new dignities of bride and hereditary princess. She was loved and courted by all, and at the Tuileries especially, fêtes and balls succeeded one another. Now from these crumbled walls brilliant visions arose before her ; once more she saw the vast and magnificent halls, the dazzling glitter of lights and jewels, the long trains of the court dresses sweeping majestically up the broad stairs between the double rows of glittering breastplates ; and the strains of music from the invisible band she heard at intervals floating upwards from the gardens, recalled to her the orchestra led by Waldteufel to which she had so often listened in the Salle des Maréchaux. Was it not to this lively and tripping measure that she had danced with their cousin Maximilian, a week before he started for Mexico ? Yes, indeed it was the same ! A quadrille made up of Emperors and Kings, of Queens and Empresses, whose movements and august countenances passed before her eyes in a mirage called up by the air of the *Belle Hélène* now being played. Max, full of gloomy presentiments, nervously gnawing his moustache, Charlotte opposite to him, by the side of Napoleon, radiant,

transfigured in the triumph of her Imperial dignity. Where were they all now, these quondam dancers of the gay quadrille? Dead, exiled or mad! Death after death, disaster after disaster! Was God then no longer the God of kings?

Then she recalled all she had suffered since the death of old King Leopold had placed upon her brow the two-fold crown of Illyria and Dalmatia. Her first-born, a daughter, carried off in the midst of the festivities of the coronation by one of those mysterious diseases which betoken the end of a worn-out race, so that the tapers of the funereal vigil were mingled with the illuminations of the city, and the festive flags in the cathedral could not be removed before the funeral service took place. Then, besides this great sorrow, besides the continual torments of anxiety she endured from the sickly constitution of her son, other griefs were added, griefs known only to herself, hidden away in the most secret recesses of her womanly pride. Alas! the hearts of nations are not more faithful than those of kings. One day, without apparent reason, Illyria, who had shown so much enthusiasm, suddenly became indifferent to her princes. Then misunderstandings arose, feelings of distrust and stubborn opposition were awakened; hatred, the horrible hatred of a whole country, was felt in the air, in the silence of the streets, in the cold irony of the glances, in the quivering rebellion of the

still bowed heads, making her dread to show herself at the windows of her palace, and shrink back in her coach during her short and rapid drives. Ah ! as she gazed at the palace of the kings of France, she fancied she still heard the terrible outcries, the horrible threats of death under the terraces of her own palace of Leybach. She remembered the last cabinet council, the pallid faces of her terror-stricken ministers imploring the king to abdicate; then the flight at night, disguised as peasants, across the mountains, the insurgent villages intoxicated with liberty as well as the towns, the bonfires crowning every hill-top, and the tears that had burst from her one evening in her joy at finding a little milk in a shepherd's cabin for the supper of her boy. Then finally the sudden decision she had induced the king to take, to make the still faithful Ragusa his stronghold, and the two months of privations and anguish endured there ; the town besieged, bombarded, the royal child, her sickly boy, dying almost of hunger ; and, to crown all, the shame of surrender, the lugubrious embarkation, in the midst of the silent and wearied spectators, on board the French ship which was to bear them to further trouble and misfortunes far away into the cold chill of exile, while behind them the flag of the Illyrian Republic floated new and victorious over the crumbling walls of the Royal Palace. The ruins of the Tuileries brought back all this to her mind.

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Her musing was suddenly interrupted by a joyous exclamation uttered in a youthful but slightly nasal voice : " Is not Paris beautiful ? "

The king had just appeared upon the balcony, holding the little prince in his arms, and was showing him the horizon of roofs, domes, and verdure, and the busy bustle of the street in the soft light of the closing day.

" Oh yes, very beautiful," said the child—a puny little creature five or six years old, with sharp - marked features and almost colourless fair hair cut close to the head, as after a long illness—he looked around him with a sweet, sickly smile, surprised at no longer hearing the roar of the cannon, and happy in the surrounding joyousness. For him, exile was a pleasant thing ; neither did the king appear overcome with sadness ; a couple of hours' stroll on the boulevards had imparted to him a certain exhilaration which contrasted with the depression of the queen. Moreover, these two presented types of a diametrically opposite character : the king, a slender man with pale complexion, curly black hair, and a thin moustache, which he constantly twirled between his white and supple



fingers ; soft uncertain eyes, with something irresolute and childish in their glance, giving him such an immature appearance, that notwithstanding he was over thirty years of age all who saw him could not help exclaiming : " How very young he is ! "

The queen, on the contrary, was of the robust Dalmatian type, with an expression of seriousness and strength which made her the real male of the two, despite the exquisite transparency of her skin, and the magnificent auburn tints of her hair, which seemed to have borrowed its flashes of red from Oriental henna. Christian betrayed in her presence the shy attitude of a man who had accepted too much devotion, too many sacrifices from his wife. He timidly inquired after her health, asked whether she had slept off the fatigue of the journey. She answered him with a condescending gentleness, but was in reality solely occupied with her son, feeling his nose and cheeks, and watching every one of his movements with the anxious care of a most tender mother.

" He is better already," said Christian, in a low tone.

" Yes, the colour is returning to his cheeks," she answered in the same tone of familiarity which they only adopted when speaking of their child.

The boy smiled at both, drawing their heads together in a pretty caress, as though he knew his little arms formed the only true link between these

two most dissimilar beings. Below, on the pavement, a group of bystanders who had heard of the prince's arrival stood gazing up at this King and Queen of Illyria, made famous by their heroic struggle at Ragusa, and whose portraits had figured in their illustrated papers.

By degrees the numbers increased, gaping with open mouths, and noses in the air, as though they were idly watching some pigeon or escaped parrot on the roof. Soon a large crowd was gathered in front of the hotel, all eyes staring up at this young couple in travelling costumes, with the child's fair head upraised between them, their countenances beaming with the undying hope of the vanquished, and the joy of still possessing their treasure after the appalling tempest that had swept over them.

"Are you coming in, Frédérique?" asked the king, embarrassed by the attention of the crowd.

She, however, stood with head raised high as a Queen accustomed to brave the hostile looks of the rabble.

"Why? It is very pleasant here on the balcony."

"Yes; but I had forgotten to tell you—Rosen is here with his son and daughter-in-law. He wishes to see you."

At the name of Rosen, which reminded her of so many loyal services, the queen's eyes brightened.

"My brave duke! I was expecting him,"

she said, and as she threw a last haughty look on the assembled crowd before going in, a man opposite her sprang upon the stonework of the iron railing of the Tuileries, towering above the



crowd for a moment, exactly as at Leybach when the windows of the palace had been fired at. Frédérique, vaguely dreading some similar attempt, instinctively drew back, but at the same moment, a hat upraised displayed a lofty forehead, with hair streaming back, lit up by the setting sun, and a



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calm powerful voice cried out "Long live the king." Above the noises of the street, this was all she could catch of the unknown friend, who, in the heart of republican Paris, in face of the crumbling Tuileries, had thus dared to welcome the de-throned sovereigns. This sympathetic cheer, long grown unfamiliar, gave the queen the comforting sensation of a bright fire after a cold march. It warmed her to the core, and the sight of old Rosen completed the genial and beneficent feeling of reaction.



The General Duc de Rosen, formerly at the head of the king's household troops, had left Illyria three years before, when the king had taken from him his post, which was one of trust, to bestow it on a liberal, thus favouring the new ideas to the prejudice of what was then called at Leybach the queen's party. He had certainly every right to resent this treatment at the hands of Christian, who had deliberately sacrificed him, let him go

without an expression of regret or even a farewell, he, the victorious hero of Mostar, of Livno, of the Montenegrin wars. After having sold his houses and estates with an ostentation that was intended as a protest against injustice, the old general had settled in Paris, had established his son there, and after three years of anxious and vain expectation, had felt his anger at the royal ingratitude increase by the addition of the dreariness of absence, and of an unoccupied existence. And yet at the very first news of his princes' arrival he had hastened to them without a moment's hesitation ; and now, he stood erect in their drawing-room, his immense stature towering up to the chandelier, waiting for the favour of a gracious welcome with such deep emotion, that his great legs trembled and his broad chest heaved under the wide ribbon of his order and the tight-fitting military looking frock-coat which he invariably wore. His head alone, the head of a bird of prey, with its steel glance, its scant, bristling white hair, and the thousand wrinkles of its parched fire-proof skin, remained immoveable. The king, who hated scenes and felt embarrassed by this first interview, tried to turn it off by affecting a sort of playful and off-hand cordiality.

“Well, general,” he said, coming towards him with outstretched hands, “you were right after all. I kept too loose a rein. I have been roughly dealt with, and sharply too.”

And, as he saw his old follower bend the knee, he raised him with a gesture full of nobility and clasped him in a long embrace. Nothing, however, could prevent the duke from kneeling before his Queen, and it was with a singular feeling of emotion, that she felt upon her hand the respectfully passionate touch of his old moustache.

“Ah, my poor Rosen ! my poor Rosen !” she murmured.

She closed her eyes to hide her tears, but all those she had shed for years past had left their traces upon her soft fair lids, together with the anguish of night-watches and constant anxiety ;—these leave scars that women fancy they can hide in the deepest recesses of their heart, but they will re-appear at the surface, just as the least motion of a lake furrows its surface in perceptible ripples. For the space of a moment the beautiful face assumed a tired, mournful expression which did not escape the attention of the old soldier : “How she has suffered,” he thought, as he looked at her ; then to conceal his own emotion, he raised himself abruptly, and turning towards his son and daughter-in-law, who had remained at the other end of the room, in the same stern voice in which he used to give the word of command in the streets of Leybach : “Draw swords. Charge the rascals !” he ordered : “Colette, Herbert, come and salute your queen.” Prince Herbert of Rosen, almost as tall as his

father, with the jaw of a horse, and round babyish cheeks, came forward, followed by his young wife. He walked with difficulty, leaning on his stick. Eight months before he had broken his leg and a few ribs in a race at Chantilly ; and the general was not sorry for the opportunity of saying that, had it not been for this accident which had put his son's life in danger, they would both have hurried to Ragusa to the aid of their sovereign.

“ I should have followed you, father ! ” added the princess, in a heroic tone of voice, which contrasted oddly with her name of Colette, and her funny little cat-like nose and frizzle of fair locks.

The queen could not help smiling, and held out her hand cordially. Christian, twirling his moustache, stared with an amateur's curiosity at this lively little Parisian, this pretty bird, with its long glittering plumage made up of flowers and skirts, whose dainty get-up was such a change from the majestic type and noble features to which he had been accustomed.

“ Lucky dog ! Where can Herbert have picked up such a little gem ? ” he said to himself, envying his old playfellow, that great booby with goggle eyes and hair parted and plaistered down on a low narrow forehead ; then it suddenly occurred to him that although in Illyria this type of woman might be rare, it was common in Paris ; and at this thought exile appeared to him decidedly bearable.

Moreover this exile could not possibly be a long one. The Illyrians must soon get tired of their Republic. It would be an affair of some two or three months, a sort of royal holiday, which he must try to spend as gaily as possible.

“Will you believe, General, that it has already been proposed to us that we should purchase a house? An Englishman came this morning and guaranteed he could procure one for me in forty-eight hours in whatever part of the city I should choose; a magnificent house, sumptuously furnished, with stables full of horses, coach-houses full of carriages, linen, plate, and servants—the whole thing complete.”

“I know your Englishman, Monseigneur; his name is Tom Levis, a foreign commission agent.”

“Yes, that was it, a name something like that. Have you had dealings with him?”

“Oh! all foreigners who come to Paris receive a visit from Tom. I trust for your Majesty’s sake that the acquaintance may go no further.”

The singular attention which Prince Herbert had devoted to his shoe-strings the moment Tom Levis was mentioned, and the furtive looks the princess cast at her husband, warned Christian that if he should stand in need of any information concerning the famous agent of the Rue Royale, he would know where to turn. But why should he ever stand in need of the services of the Levis

agency? He required neither house nor carriages, and fully intended to spend the few months of his stay in Paris at the hotel.

“Is not that your opinion, Frédérique?”

“Oh, yes, certainly it is the wisest plan,” answered the Queen, although at the bottom of her heart she did not share her husband’s illusions, nor his taste for temporary homes.

In his turn old Rosen ventured an observation. Life in an hotel hardly seemed to him compatible with the dignity of the royal house of Illyria. Paris was just then full of exiled sovereigns, and all lived in sumptuous style. The King of Westphalia occupied a magnificent residence in the Rue de Neubourg, with an annexe for the offices of his administration. The mansion of the Queen of Galicia in the Champs Élysées was a true palace, combining the luxury and pomp of royalty. The King of Palermo had a fine establishment at Saint-Mandé, with plenty of horses, and a whole troop of *aides-de-camp*. Even the Duke of Palma, in his small house at Passy, held a sort of court, and had always five or six generals dining at his table.

“No doubt,” said Christian impatiently; “no doubt, but the case is not the same. They are all settled in Paris, it is an understood, definitive thing, whereas we—Besides, there is one very good reason, friend Rosen, why we should not purchase a palace. All we possessed has been taken from us. A few

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thousands at Rothschild's at Naples, and our poor crown which was rescued by Madame de Silvis and brought away in a bandbox, is all that remains. To think that the Marquise made the long journey into exile, on foot, by carriage or rail, even crossing the sea, always holding her precious bandbox in her hand ! Really, it was too funny !”

And his childishness getting the better of him, he began to laugh over their poverty as if it were the most amusing thing in the world.

The duke, however, did not laugh.

“Sire,” he said, so deeply moved that all his old wrinkles quivered, “you did me the honour just now of assuring me that you felt some regret at having kept me for so long a time absent from your heart and your council. Well, I now ask you a favour in return. As long as your exile lasts restore me to the post I filled at Leybach in the service of your Majesties—comptroller of the civil and military household.”

“Eh ! what ambition !” said the king gaily.

Then turning affectionately towards him, he added :

“My poor general, I have no household now, none, neither civil nor military. The queen has her chaplain and two women. Zara has his governess ; as for me I have brought Boscovich to write my correspondence and Lebeau to shave my chin ; and that is all.”

“In that case, I shall still ask for another favour. Will your Majesty consent to take my son Herbert as *aide-de-camp* and appoint the princess his wife to the post of reader and lady-in-waiting to the queen.”

“Your request is granted, duke, as far as I am concerned,” said the queen, smiling brightly to Colette, who stood bewildered by her new dignity.

As for the prince, he thanked his sovereign for the title of *aide-de-camp* he had just conferred upon him in the same gracious manner by a graceful neigh, a trick he had contracted at Tattersall’s, where he spent most of his time.

“To-morrow morning I shall lay the three appointments before His Majesty for his signature,” added the general in a respectful but curt tone, thereby intimating that he considered himself as already entered upon his new functions.

On hearing the voice and formula which had so long and so solemnly haunted him, the young king’s face expressed a momentary ennui and discouragement; but he soon consoled himself as he looked at the princess, whose countenance was transfigured and improved by joy, as often happens to pretty insignificant faces whose beauty and piquancy lies in continual mobility of expression. Just fancy Colette Sauvadon, the niece of Sauvadon, wine merchant at Bercy, lady-in-waiting to the Queen Frédérique! What will the inhabitants of the Rue de Varennes and the Rue Saint-Dominique



say, and all those select circles to which her marriage with Herbert had only admitted her on grand reception days, never on intimate terms. Her imagination was already conjuring up a fanciful court. She thought of the visiting cards she would order and of all the new dresses she would have made; for instance, she would certainly have one in the colours of Illyria, with rosettes to match on her horses' heads. Presently the king's voice recalled her from her dreams.

"This is our first meal in the land of exile," he said in a half-serious voice to Rosen; and, in a tone he purposely made emphatic, he added, "I wish the table to be cheerful and surrounded by all our friends."

But noticing the scared look of the general at this sudden invitation:

"Ah, I see, you are quite right. I forgot. We have dropped all habits of etiquette since the siege, and the comptroller of the household will have many reforms to make. Only I request that they shall not begin till to-morrow."

At this moment the doors were thrown open, and the butler announced their Majesties' dinner. The princess was already preparing to rise, full of importance, to take Christian's arm, but he offered his arm to the queen, and, quietly ignoring his guests, led her into the dining-room. All the ceremonial of the court had not, after all, remained buried in the casemates at Ragusa.

The sudden transition from the sunny room to the artificially lighted dining-room struck the guests as they entered. Notwithstanding a central chandelier, two side candelabras, and two large lamps placed on the sideboard, it seemed dim, as though the daylight revenged itself for having been thus brutally shut out before its time, by casting a dubious twilight on the scene. The length and disproportion of the table with the small number of guests also added to the appearance of gloom; it was a table that had been sought for all over the hotel to suit the demands of etiquette, and the king and queen took their places at one end of it, no one sitting opposite, or next to them. This filled the little Princess of Rosen with surprise and admiration. In the last years of the Empire, when she had dined at the Tuileries, she remembered having seen the Emperor and Empress seated opposite one another, just like any ordinary married couple at their wedding breakfast.

“Ah,” thought the little *cocodette* \* as she shut her fan with a decided gesture, and placed it near her by the side of her gloves, “Legitimacy, that is the only real thing!”

And this thought transformed for her the sparsely attended kind of table d’hôte, which recalled the

\* Nickname given under the Empire to ladies of the fashionable fast society.

splendid dining-rooms along the Italian Corniche road, between Monaco and San Remo, at the beginning of the season before the tourists begin to pour in. The same medley of people and costumes ; Christian in a shooting-jacket, the Queen in a travelling-dress, Herbert and his wife in fashionable costumes, fitted for the boulevards ; the Franciscan cassock of Father Alphée, the queen's chaplain, side by side with the military-looking frock-coat of the general, covered with his many decorations. Nothing, in short, could be less imposing. One thing alone lent some grandeur to the scene,—the prayer of the chaplain, invoking a divine blessing on this, the first repast partaken of in exile.

“*Quæ sumus sumpturi prima die in exile,*” said the monk, with outstretched hands ; and the words, slowly enunciated, seemed to lengthen out far into the future the short holiday contemplated by King Christian.

“*Amen!*” responded, in a grave voice, the despoiled sovereign, as though in the Latin of the Church, he had at last felt the thousand broken ties which cling with living and quivering hold, like the roots of an upturn tree, to the banished of all times and places.

Nevertheless, the strongest impressions did not dwell long in this polished and caressing Slav nature. He was hardly seated, before his natural

gaiety and heedlessness returned, and he began to talk in French, out of regard for the Parisian Colette, correctly, but with a slight Italian lisp that well suited his laugh. In a heroic-comic tone he related different episodes of the siege ; the settling-down of the court in the casemates, and the singular figure cut by the Marquise Gouvernante Eléonore de Silvis, in her green feathered hat and her plaid. Fortunately, that innocent lady was dining in her pupil's room, and could not hear the laughter caused by the king's description. After her, Boscovich and his herbarium served the king as a butt. With boyish glee he seemed to wish to revenge himself for the gravity of the circumstances by turning them into ridicule. The aulic councillor Boscovich, a small middle-aged man, gentle and timorous, with rabbit's eyes looking always askance, was a learned juriconsult, passionately fond of botany. The law courts being closed at Ragusa, he spent his time in botanising in the ditches of the fortifications, under fire of the shells, with the unconscious heroism natural to a mind utterly absorbed in one idea, and who, in the midst of the terrible disaster that had befallen his country, was solely preoccupied about the fate of a magnificent herbarium that had been left behind in the hands of the liberals.

“Fancy, my poor old Boscovich,” said the king to frighten him ; “fancy what a jolly bonfire they

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will have made of all that heap of dried flowers ; unless, indeed, the Republic should have decided, out of economy, to cut new capes for its militia out of your great sheets of grey blotting-paper."

The councillor joined in the general laugh, with scared looks however, and abortive efforts to protest : "*Ma che ! Ma che !*" which betrayed his childish apprehensions.

"How charming the king is ! how witty ! and what eyes !" thought the little princess towards whom Christian kept bending at every moment, as though he would fain lessen the distance made between them by the exigences of etiquette.

It was a pleasure to see her expand under the evident admiration of his august glance, toying with her fan, uttering little cries, and throwing back her supple figure, which shook with rippling and ringing laughter. The queen, by her attitude and her close conversation with her neighbour, the old duke, seemed to isolate herself from the overflow of gaiety. Once or twice when the siege was being spoken of, she had said a few words, speaking emphatically of the king's bravery, his knowledge of strategy, after which she had resumed her own conversation. The general, in a low voice, inquired about the persons of the court he had known, old companions in arms, who, more fortunate than himself, had followed their princes to Ragusa. Many had been left there, and as Rosen mentioned

each name, the queen responded in her serious voice : "Dead, dead," the words sounding like the funereal knell of all those so recently departed.

However, after dinner, when they returned to the drawing-room, Frédérique was more cheerful. She made Colette de Rosen sit beside her on the sofa, and talked to her with the affectionate familiarity that attracted the sympathy of all around her ; it was like the pressure of her beautiful hand with its tapered fingers and broad palm, which communicated by its firm grasp something of her own comforting energy. Suddenly she said :

"Come, princess, let us go and see Zara put to bed."

At the end of a long lobby, encumbered like the rest of the apartment with piled-up boxes, open trunks overflowing with linen and articles of clothing, all the disorder of a recent arrival, was the room of the little prince, lighted by a lamp, the lowered shade of which threw the light on to the blue bed-curtains at the level of the bed.

A waiting-woman was sleeping seated on a box, her head wrapped in the white coif and neck-handkerchief bordered with pink that forms the headgear of the Dalmatian women. Near the table, the governess, resting lightly on her elbow with an open book in her lap, was also undergoing the soporific influence of the story she had been reading, and retained even in her sleep the senti-

mental and romantic air which had caused the king's mirth and excited his mockery.

The queen's entrance failed to rouse her, but at the very first movement of the mosquito-net that veiled his bed, the little prince stretched out his



hands and made an effort to sit up, with wide-open eyes and vacant gaze. For so many months he had been accustomed to sudden wakings, hurried dressings, startings, and flights in the middle of the night, to find himself reawakening in new places with new faces around him, that he had lost the deep sleep of childhood—and his was no longer the

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ten hours' journeying in the land of dreams, which children accomplish to the accompaniment of the soft and almost imperceptible rhythm of their gentle breathing.

"Good night, mama," he said in a low voice ;  
"are we going to start off again ?"

By this resigned and touching exclamation all that the child had suffered was revealed, a suffering far beyond his years and strength.

"No, no, my darling ; we are in safety at last. Sleep ; you must try to sleep."

"Oh ! very well. I shall go back to the mountain of glass with the giant Robistor ; I was enjoying myself so much."

"Madame Eléonore's stories are muddling his brain," said the queen, softly. "Poor little one ! Life is so dark and gloomy for him. Fairy tales are the only things that amuse him. We shall have, nevertheless, to make up our minds to put something else in his head before long."

As she spoke she arranged the child's pillow and settled him to rest with the caressing gesture of any other mother, which quite upset Colette de Rosen's grandiose ideas about royalty. Then, as she bent down to kiss her son, he asked in a whisper, what was the noise he heard rumbling in the distance, the cannon or the sea. The queen listened for a moment to the confused and constant rolling, which at times made the walls crack and



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the windows rattle, enveloping the house from top to bottom, then dying away and bursting out afresh, increasing and losing itself in an infinitude of similar noises.



“It is nothing, only Paris, my son. Go to sleep.”

And the little fallen prince, who had heard of Paris as of a refuge, went off to sleep again, full of confidence, lulled by the sounds of the revolutionary city.

When the queen and the princess returned to the drawing-room they found the king standing

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by the side of a young and noble-looking woman, with whom he was talking. The familiar tone of their conversation, the respectful distance the rest of the company maintained, shewed that she was a personage of some importance. The queen uttered a cry of emotion :

“ Maria ! ”

“ Frédérique ! ”

A mutual impulse threw them into each other's arms. In answer to an inquiring glance of his wife, Herbert de Rosen named the visitor. She was the Queen of Palermo. Somewhat taller and slighter than her cousin the Queen of Illyria, she seemed a few years older. Her black eyes, her dark hair brushed back off her forehead, and her pale complexion gave her the appearance of an Italian, although she was born at the Court of Bavaria. There was a certain Germanic look in her long flat figure, and the haughty expression of her smile ; besides the unmistakable dowdiness and want of harmony in dress so peculiar to the other side of the Rhine. Frédérique, who had been left an orphan at an early age, had been brought up at Munich with this cousin, and they had retained a strong affection for one another.

“ You see, I could not wait,” said the Queen of Palermo, holding her hands. “ Cecco did not return, so I came without him. I was longing to see you. You have been so constantly in my

thoughts. Oh! that dreadful cannon of Ragusa, I fancied I heard it at night from Vincennes."

"It was but the echo of the cannon of Caserta," said Christian, alluding to the heroic conduct that a few years before had distinguished this poor queen, fallen and exiled like themselves.

She sighed :

"Oh, yes! Caserta. We were deserted by all, as you were. How pitiable; as if all monarchs should not stand by each other. But all that has come to an end. The world has gone mad!"

Then turning to Christian, she added :

"Nevertheless, I must compliment you, cousin; you have fallen like a king."

"Oh!" he said, pointing to Frédérique, "the true king of us two——"

A sign from his wife stopped him. He bowed, smiled, and turning on his heel :

"Come and smoke, Herbert!" he said to his aide-de-camp. And they stepped out together on the balcony.

The evening was balmy and lovely, and the last glimmer of day was fading and disappearing in bluish tints round the brilliant gas-lamps. The dark mass of chestnut trees in the Tuileries maintained a fanlike breeze around them and quickened the flashing light of the stars. This background of verdure and space imparted to the Rue de Rivoli a less suffocating appearance than is usual to the

streets of Paris in summer ; but the constant drifting of the population in the direction of the Champs Elysées could be distinctly felt, wending its way to its open-air concerts under the flaring circles of gas-lights. All the amusements which in winter are confined within warmly-draped window-hangings, now filled the streets ; pleasure sung and laughed freely, in flowering bonnets, fluttering mantillas, muslin dresses, revealing as they passed under a street-lamp a glimpse of a white neck and black velvet ribbon. The cafés and pastrycook shops overflowed on to the pavement, with sounds of money, clinking of glasses and many calls.

“Paris is a wonderful place,” said Christian of Illyria, puffing the smoke of his cigar out into the darkness. “The very air seems different from anywhere else ; it has something exciting and heady about it. Fancy that at Leybach at this hour everything is closed, extinguished, asleep.”

Then in a tone of delight he went on :

“I say, my dear aide-de-camp, I trust I am going to be initiated to the pleasures of Paris ; you seem to know all about them, to be quite up in them.”

“Yes indeed, monseigneur,” replied Herbert, neighing with gratified vanity. “At any club, at the opera, everywhere, I am called the king of the *gomme !*” *

While Christian made him explain the meaning

* Mashers.

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of this new word, the two queens, who had gone into Frédérique's room to converse more freely, poured forth their sad confidences in low whispers that could be heard behind the half-closed shutters. In the drawing-room Father Alphée and the old duke were also talking in a low tone.

"He is quite right," said the chaplain ; "it is she who is the king, the real king. If you could have seen her on horseback, at the outposts day and night ! At the fort Saint-Angelo, when the balls were flying thick, in order to encourage the soldiers, she walked twice round the top of the trenches, proud and erect, her riding habit over her arm and her whip in her hand, as though she were quietly going round her own park. You should have seen our sailors when she came down ! He, meanwhile, was gadding about, God only knows where ! Brave he certainly is, as brave as she is, but without conviction or faith ; and to save a throne as to gain Heaven, Monsieur le Duc, we must needs have faith."

The monk getting excited, seemed to grow taller in his long robe, and Rosen was obliged to calm him.

"Lower, Father Alphée. Speak lower, please." For he feared lest Colette should hear him.

Colette had been left to the tender mercies of the Councillor Boscovich, who was entertaining her with an account of his plants, mingling scientific

terms with the minute details of his botanical expeditions. His conversation had an aroma of faded herbs and the dusty atmosphere of an old provincial library. Nevertheless, such is the powerful attraction of greatness, so delightfully intoxicating is its atmosphere to certain little beings eager to breathe it in, that the young princess, Princess Colette, the soul of Paris balls, of its races, and its theatres, ever in the van of all its gaieties, this same Princess Colette bestowed her most fascinating smiles upon the councillor, as she listened to his arid nomenclature. It was enough for her to know that a king was talking at the window, that two queens were exchanging confidences in the next room, to make the commonplace hotel room where even her own elegance seemed to be out of its element, assume the air of solemn grandeur and gloomy majesty which throws so melancholy an appearance over the wide halls at Versailles, and their polished floors that glisten as brightly as their mirrors. She could have remained there in an ecstasy until midnight, without stirring, or feeling the least ennui, slightly puzzled however by the lengthy conversation between the king and her husband. What serious subjects could they be discussing? What vast plans for the restoration of monarchy? Her curiosity increased when she saw them reappear with flushed faces, bright and resolute eyes.

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“I am going out with Monseigneur,” said Herbert, in a low tone ; “my father will take you home.”

The king approached her in his turn :

“You will not be angry with me, Princess, I hope ; he is entering upon his functions.”

“Every instant of our lives belongs to your Majesties,” replied the princess, persuaded that they were bent on some important and mysterious business ; perhaps indeed a first meeting of conspirators. Oh ! if only she could follow them !

Christian had taken a step towards the queen’s room, but when he reached the door, he paused.

“They are crying,” he said to Herbert, turning back. “Good night, I shall not go in.”

Once in the street he gave way to an explosion of joy and relief, and took his aide-de-camp’s arm, after having lit a fresh cigar in the hall of the hotel.

“You cannot understand how refreshing it is,” he said, “to go alone into the crowd, to walk and mix with the rest of the world, to be master of one’s words and actions, and if a pretty girl passes by, to be free to turn and look after her without any fear of upsetting the equilibrium of Europe. This is the advantage of exile. When I came to Paris some eight years ago, I saw it from the windows of the Tuileries, from the seats of the gala-coaches. This time I want to see it all, every corner, by Jove. But I forgot you were lame, my

poor Herbert, and I am making you walk. Wait, let us hail a cab."

In vain did the prince strive to protest. His leg was not painful, and he felt quite able to walk. But Christian insisted.

"No, no, I will not have my guide knocked up on the very first evening."

He hailed a passing cab that was going in the direction of the Place de la Concorde with a rattle of strained springs and cracking of whip on the bony frame of the wretched horse; he jumped lightly in and settled himself on the faded blue cloth cushions, rubbing his hands with childish glee.

"Where are we going, *mon prince*?" asked the coachman, little aware of how exact was the appellation.

And Christian of Illyria answered in the triumphant voice of an emancipated school-boy:

"To Mabile."





II.

A ROYALIST.

CLOSE-SHAVEN and bare-headed under a fine sharp December drizzle, that rimmed like steel drops their brown woollen cassocks, two monks wearing the girdle and round cowl of the Franciscan order, walked with long strides rapidly down the rue Monsieur-le-Prince. In the midst of all the transformations of the Latin quarter, of those wide thoroughfares that have opened out and destroyed all the originality and memorials of ancient Paris, the rue Monsieur-le-Prince still preserves its original student aspect. The booksellers' shops, the coffee-houses, the cook-shops, the old clothes-

dealers, "sale and purchase of gold and silver," succeed one another up to the heights of Sainte-Geneviève, and scholars still stalk up and down at all hours of the day, not indeed the students drawn by Gavarni, with long straggling locks and woollen Scotch caps ; but lawyers of the future, tightly buttoned up in ulsters, carefully gloved, and carrying enormous leathern portfolios under their arms, assuming already the sharp, cold manners of men of business ; or else doctors in perspective, more easy in their gait, retaining from the material, human side of their studies, an expansion of animal life as a compensation for their perpetual struggle with death.

At this early hour young women in loose wrappers and slippers, their eyes swollen from want of sleep, their hair rolled up in dangling nets, were already crossing the street to fetch milk for their breakfast from the dairy, some laughing and hastening through the sleet, others on the contrary, with prim dignity, swinging their milk cans, and trailing their slipshod feet and their faded finery with the majestic indifference of pantomime queens ; and as, notwithstanding ulsters and morocco portfolios, youthful hearts are always susceptible, passing students were smiling at the fair ones. "Hullo, Léa." "Good morning, Clémence." They hailed one another across the street, making appointments for the evening :

“Be at the Medici’s to-night,” or else “I’ll see you at the Louis XIII.’s.” Then suddenly at a joke too coarse or misunderstood, one of the girls would break out in astounding indignation, with the invariable retort : “Get along with you, you saucy fellow !” Imagine how the two monks must have shuddered on coming in contact with all these gay young folk, constantly turning and laughing as they passed. The laugh, however, was speedily checked at the sight of one of the Franciscans, who, lean and lanky, possessed the grim countenance of a pirate under his dark bushy eyebrows, and whose cassock, tightened in coarse folds by a cord at the waist, revealed the sturdy loins and muscular form of an athlete. Neither he nor his companion appeared to notice anything in the street, but strode along hurriedly, gazing straight before them, absorbed in the object of their errand. Before reaching the flight of steps leading to the School of Medicine, the elder said to the other : “It is here.”

He pointed to a lodging-house of poor aspect at the end of an alley, closed by a belled green gate, situated between a shop full of cheap newspapers, penny ballads, and coloured pictures in which the grotesque hat of Dom Basile figured in a multitude of attitudes, and a low beershop, bearing on its signboard the words : “*Brasserie du Rialto*,” so called no doubt because the waiting was done by young women in Venetian head-dresses.

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“Is Monsieur Elysée gone out?” inquired one of the Fathers, as they passed the hotel office on the first storey.

A fat woman, who by her appearance must have roved through many a lodging-house before she became herself the mistress of one, lazily answered from her chair, without even taking the trouble of consulting the rows of keys hanging on the rack.

“Gone out, at this hour! You had better say, has he come home!”

Then changing her tone at the sight of the cassocks, she indicated Elysée Méraut’s room.

“No. 36, on the fifth floor, at the end of the lobby.”

The Franciscans went up, wandering through narrow passages, littered with muddy boots and high-heeled shoes of every description: grey, bronze, fantastic, luxurious, or miserable, that told many a tale of the occupier’s existence; but they heeded nothing, sweeping the passage with their rough skirts and the crosses of their long rosaries, scarcely moved even when a handsome young woman in scarlet petticoat, and her bare arms and shoulders thrust into a man’s overcoat, crossed the landing on the third floor and leant over the bannisters to scream out some order to the waiter, with a husky voice and laugh issuing from a peculiarly coarse mouth. They exchanged, however, a significative glance.

“If he is the man you describe,” muttered the

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corsair in a foreign accent, "he has chosen singular company."



A smile full of malice and priestly indulgence crossed the face of the elder monk, an intelligent and shrewd-looking man.

“Saint Paul among the Gentiles !” he murmured.

When they reached the fifth storey, they had a moment’s hesitation, the low ceiling of the dark staircase hardly allowing the numbers to be discerned, and several doors being ornamented by cards, such as “Mademoiselle Alice,” without any mention of a business, a mention that would in truth have been superfluous, for there were several competitors in that line of trade in the house ; but fancy if these excellent Fathers had by mistake knocked at one of their doors !

“We must call his name !” said the bushy-eyed monk, and the hotel rang with a “Monsieur M é r a u t !” emphasized in a right martial manner.

Not a whit less vigorous, not a whit less vibrating was the reponse to his call, which issued from a room at the end of the passage. And when they opened the door, the voice continued cheerfully :

“Ah, it is you, Father Melchior ! I’m out of luck ! I hoped it was a registered letter. Come in all the same, Reverend Father, you are welcome, and, if you can, pray sit down.”

Books, reviews, newspapers were indeed piled up on every article of furniture, hiding the sordid conventionality of a poverty-stricken lodging, the discoloured tiles, the broken-down divan, and the invariable *Empire* writing-table, and the three faded velvet chairs. On the bed lay scattered in a

confused medley : printed papers, clothes, and a thin brown blanket, with files of proofs that the master of the locality, still in bed, slashed with great marks in coloured pencil. The wretched interior, the fireless chimney, the naked dustiness of the walls were lighted up by the neighbouring



roofs, the reflection of a rainy sky on glistening slates ; and Méraut's wide brow, his powerful and passionate face was illumined by it, showing the sad but intelligent expression that distinguishes certain faces and is met with nowhere but in Paris.

“ Still in my hovel, you see, Father Melchior ! It cannot be helped. I alighted here on my arrival eighteen years ago. Since then, I have not budged.

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What dreams, what hopes have I not buried in every corner, how many conceits do I not find hidden away in the dust. I am sure that if I left this shabby little room, I should be leaving the best part of myself. I am so convinced of it, that I kept it on when I left to go yonder."

"Ah, to be sure, and what about your journey?" said Father Melchior, casting a glance at his companion. "I thought you had intended staying away for some time. What happened? Did not the situation suit you?"

"Oh! the situation was magnificent," replied Méraut, shaking his mane, "it would have been impossible to have a better berth. The pay of a minister plenipotentiary, lodged in the palace, and horses, carriages, servants at my disposal. Everybody was most kind to me, the Emperor, Empress and Archdukes. Nevertheless I felt dull and bored. In spite of all, I longed for Paris, the Latin Quarter especially, the air we breathe here, so light and full of life. I missed the galleries under the Odéon, the new book turned over standing by the stalls, and the hunt for old books, those musty volumes piled up on the parapets of the quays, like a rampart sheltering studious Paris from the frivolity and selfishness of its other quarters. And then, that is not all—here his voice grew more serious—you know my ideas, Father Melchior. You know what was my ambition in accepting the position of

a subaltern. I hoped to make a king of that little fellow, a king really kingly, such as we never see now-a-days. I intended to raise him, form him, prepare him for the grand part that overpowers and crushes them all, like the mediæval armour kept in old castles that shames our narrow chests and shoulders. Ah well, do you know what I found at the Court at X. ? Liberals, my dear friend, radicals, men devoted to all the new ideas. Horrible plebeians who will not understand that if monarchy is condemned, it had better perish fighting, wrapped up in its flag, than die in an invalid's chair rolled towards the grave by some foolish Parliament. No later than my first lesson, there was an outcry through the whole palace. Where did this fellow come from ? What designs had this barbarian ? Then with many soft words I was requested to keep to my duties of pedagogue. An usher in fact ! When I saw that, I took up my hat and said good-bye to their Majesties !”

He spoke in a strong full voice and a southern accent that had a metallic ring in every cord of it ; and as he spoke his face was transfigured. His head, which at rest was large and ugly ; a great bumpy forehead overshadowed by a shock of black hair streaked with one white tuft ; a thick, broken nose ; a powerful mouth devoid of any beard that might have concealed its appearance, for his skin had the wrinkles and cracks and hardness and

sterility of a heated volcanic soil: this became marvellously brightened and lightened by passion. Imagine a veil torn away, the black blower of a grate suddenly raised, displaying a joyous and reviving blaze, a revelation of inborn eloquence flashing from the eyes and mobile features, spread by the rush of heart's-blood over that face worn and marked by every kind of excess and every fatigue. The landscapes in Languedoc, Méraut's native land, bare, sterile, grey like the dusty olive trees, assume in the many-coloured settings of their relentless sun this gorgeous resplendence traversed by fairy-like shadows which seem the decomposition of a ray, the slow and gradual death of a rainbow.

"So you are disgusted with *grandees*?" said the old monk, in an insinuating and muffled voice, that was in a strong contrast with this explosion of eloquence.

"Certainly!" replied the other, energetically.

"Nevertheless, all kings are not alike. I know one whom your ideas——"

"No, no, Father Melchior. That is at an end. I do not wish to try such an experiment again. I should fear lest seeing sovereigns too closely, I might lose all respect for them."

After a moment's silence, the wily priest sought a subterfuge to carry back his thoughts to the same subject.

“This six months’ absence must have been detrimental to you, Méraut.”

“No, hardly. First, the uncle Sauvadon has remained faithful to me ; you know Sauvadon, my rich Bercy fellow. As he meets a great many people at his niece’s, the Princess of Rosen, and wishes to mix in the conversation, it is I whom he has appointed to give him three times a week what he calls ‘ideas about things in general.’ His confidence and simplicity are delightful, poor man ! ‘Monsieur Méraut, what am I to think about this book?’ ‘Execrable.’ ‘Indeed, yet it seemed to me ; I heard some one say the other evening at the princess’s——’ ‘If you have an opinion my presence here is useless.’ ‘No, no, my dear friend, you know very well I have no opinion of my own.’ The fact is he really has none and blindly adopts any of my suggestions. I am his thinking matter. After I left, he no longer spoke, having no more ideas. And when I returned, you should have seen how he literally threw himself upon me. Then I have a couple of Wallachians whom I instruct in political law. And, besides, I have always some small job on hand. For instance, I am finishing just now a *Memorial of the Siege of Ragusa* drawn from authentic documents. There is not much of my scribbling in it, except the last chapter, which I am rather pleased with. I have the proofs here. Shall I read it to you ? I have called it *Europe without Kings !*”

While he read his royalist memorial, with an animation that moved him to tears, the awakening of the inmates of the hotel surrounded them with the sounds of mirth and youth, mingled with the clinking of plates and glasses and the wooden clang of an old piano, on which was hammered the tune of a low music-hall ballad,—a strange contrast indeed, of which the Franciscans were hardly cognizant, absorbed and charmed as they were by the sounds of this forcible and brutal defence of royalty. The taller one more especially quivered restlessly, striving to repress his enthusiastic exclamations with a gesture of his arms that seemed to crush his very chest. The chapter ended, he drew himself up erect, paced the room impatiently with mighty stride, overflowing with gestures and words :

“Yes, that is true ; that is the real, legitimate, absolute, divine right”—only he pronounced it *lezitime* and *assolute*. “No more parliaments, no more talkers. Throw the whole gang into the fire !”

And his glance burnt and blazed like a faggot of the Inquisition. Father Melchior, however, was more calm and congratulated Méraut on his work.

“I trust you will put your name to this book,” he said.

“Not any more than to the others. You know, Father Melchior, that I am only ambitious for my

ideas. The work will be well paid. It was through Uncle Sauvadon I got this windfall, but I would willingly have written it for nothing. It is such a grand thing to record the annals of that expiring royalty, to listen to the failing breath of the old world gasping and dying with the worn-out monarchies. Here, at least, a king fell in a way that gives a haughty lesson to all. Christian is a hero! Among those notes jotted down day by day, there is the account of a stroll he took while the shells were bursting around him at the fort Saint-Angelo. It is glorious!"

One of the Fathers bowed his head. He, alas, well knew the true story of that heroic manifestation, and that still more heroic lie. But a will more powerful than his had commanded silence; and he merely made a sign to his companion, who, rising from his chair, said abruptly to Méraut:

"Well, it is for that hero's son, that accompanied by Father Alphée, almoner of the Court of Illyria, I have come to seek you. Will you undertake the education of the royal child?"

"You will have neither palaces nor grand coaches with us," added Father Alphée, with a touch of melancholy, "nor the Imperial generousities of the Court of X. You will serve dethroned princes around whom an exile that has already lasted more than a year, and that is likely to be prolonged, has thrown a veil of gloomy solitude.

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Your ideas are ours. The king, it is true, at one time trifled with radicalism, but after his fall, he recognised its worthlessness. The queen is sublime, you will see her."

"When?" impetuously inquired the visionary, suddenly replunged into all his wildest dreams of creating a king by his genius, as a writer creates a drama.

An early interview was at once arranged.

Whenever Elysée Méraut thought of his childhood—and he often thought of it, for it was the starting point of his most powerful impressions—this is what his mind always conjured up. A large room with three windows bathed in light, each filled by a silk-weaving Jacquart loom, that stretched its tall frame and interwoven meshes like busy blinds through which was imperfectly seen the sunlight and the view; a medley of roofs, of houses above houses, every window of which was also furnished with a loom, at which sat two men in shirt-sleeves, alternately moving across the weft, like pianoforte players performing a piece for four hands. Between the houses, narrow little gardens wandered up the hill-side, tiny gardens of southern climes faded and burnt up, arid and airless, full of cactus and aloes, of tall bottle-gourds and of great sunflowers turning their full-blown faces towards the west, with the bent attitude of corollas seeking the sun, and filling the atmosphere with the sickly odour of their

ripening seed—an odour that Elysée after a lapse of thirty years still fancied he smelt whenever he



thought of his native suburb. The view commanded by the stony hill on which this stirring hive-like working district was built, was crowned

by a few old and deserted windmills, ancient purveyors of the town, left standing on account of their long services, the skeletons of their sails standing out against the sky like gigantic broken antennæ, their stones slowly loosened and scattered by the wind, the sun, and the stinging dust of the South. Under the protection of these ancestral windmills, the customs and traditions of former days had been safeguarded. The whole *bourgade*—this suburban quarter was also nicknamed *l'enclos de Rey*\*—had remained ardently royalist, and in every work-room there might be seen hanging on the walls, the fat, pink portrait—with long fair hair curled and pomatumed in the style usual in 1840—of him whom the inhabitants of this little borough familiarly termed *lou Goï* (the lame one). In Elysée's home under this frame hung a smaller one in which a great red seal with the two words "*Fides, Spes*," as motto round a Saint Andrew's cross, stood out on a sheet of bluish writing-paper. From his seat, as he threw his shuttle, father Méraut could see the portrait and read the motto: *Faith, Hope*. And his wide massive features, outlined like some old medal struck under Antony, with also the aquiline nose and rounded contours of the Bourbons he loved so well, would swell and redden with emotion.

This fellow Méraut was indeed a terrible man,

\* The king's enclosure.



violent and despotic, whose voice had become full of the roar and thunder of the storm, in the attempt to drown the noise of the shuttle and loom. His wife, on the contrary, retiring and timid,



imbued with the traditions of submissiveness which reduce the old-fashioned women of the South to the level of Eastern slaves, had resigned herself to silence.

It was in this home that Elysée had grown up,

rather less harshly treated than his two brothers, because he was the youngest and most delicate. Instead of setting him to the loom at eight years of age, he was allowed a breath of that freedom so necessary to childhood,—a freedom he employed in running all day about the *enclos*, and fighting in front of the windmills, white against red, Catholics against Huguenots ; for in that part of Languedoc they still clung to the old hatreds ! The children divided into two camps, chose a windmill whose crumbling masonry served as ammunition ; and then insults were exchanged, stones flew from slings, and for hours they engaged in homeric struggles, always tragically ended by some bloody gash across a youthful forehead, or a deep cut through the silken locks—one of those childish wounds that leave a life-long mark on the tender skin, such as the one Elysée, when grown up, still showed on his temples and at the corner of his mouth.

Oh ! those windmills, how the mother cursed them, when her little lad came home at dusk, covered with blood and tatters. As for the father, he merely scolded for appearance sake, and lest his thunder should become rusty ; but once seated round the table, he would ask all the details of the battle and the names of the combatants.

“Tholozan ! Tholozan ! Are there still some of that lot ? Ah ! the rascal. I had his father at

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the end of my gun in 1815, I should have done well to have laid him low."

And then would follow a long story told in the Languedocian dialect, rough and full of metaphor, unsparing of phrase or words, of the time when he had enlisted under the Duke d'Angoulême's orders—a great general, a saint indeed.

This narrative, heard some hundreds of times, but varied each time by the paternal fervour, left as deep an impress on Elysée's heart, as the stones of the windmills on his face. He lived surrounded by a Royalist legend, in which St. Henri's day, and the 21st of January, were commemorative dates; imbued with veneration for martyr-princes who blessed the rabble with uplifted fingers like bishops, and of dauntless princesses springing on horseback to save the good cause, persecuted, betrayed, and surprised behind the black chimney-slab of some old Breton country house. Then in order to enliven the sad tale of death and exile which might have been too mournful for a child, the story of the *Poule au Pot*, and the ballad of the *Vert Galant* would be introduced, adding the mirth and glorious recollections of ancient France. It seemed to be the *Marseillaise* of the *Enclos de Rey*, this ballad about the *Vert Galant*!

When on Sundays, after vespers, the Mérauts dined on a laboriously propped up table in the sloping little garden, in the suffocating atmosphere

engendered by a summer's day, when the accumulated heat emanating from the ground and walls poured forth more powerfully and more unhealthily than in the full glare of the noontide ; when the old weaver struck up in a voice that had become celebrated among his neighbours, the ballad of "*Vive Henri Quatre, vive ce roi vaillant,*" all was hushed around them. Nothing broke the silence but the dry cracking of the reed-fence splitting from the heat, the shrill sound of some belated *cicala*, and the antiquated royalist song majestically rolling forth in all the rigidity of cadence suggestive of puffed hose and hooped skirts. The chorus : *A la santé de notre roi—c'est un Henri de bon aloi—qui fera le bien de toi, de moi,*" rhythmical and fugue-like, amused Elysée and his brothers, and they joined in, pushing and shoving one another, invariably calling down on their heads a cuff from their father ; but this interlude would not interrupt the song, and it continued in the midst of blows, laughter, and sobs, like some demoniac's hymn, sung over the tomb of the deacon Paris.

Thus ever mingled with the family merry-makings, the name of king assumed in Elysée's mind, besides the natural prestige it still holds in fairy tales or in "history written for young people," a something more intimate and homelike. And what increased this feeling were the mysterious letters on thin foreign paper that came from

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Frohsdorff two or three times a year, addressed to all the inhabitants of the *Enclos*, autographs in the delicate writing penned by fat fingers, in which the king spoke to his people and enjoined patience. On those days, father Méraut threw his shuttle more solemnly, and at night, with close-shut doors, he would read out loud the circular,—always the same mawkish proclamation, full of vague words of hope: “Frenchmen, you are deceived, and the country is deceived.” And ever the same immutable seal: “*Fides, Spes!*” Ah, poor folk, it was neither faith nor hope that they lacked.

“When the king comes back,” Méraut used to say, “I shall buy a comfortable armchair. When the king comes back, we will new paper the room.”

Later on, after his journey to Frohsdorff, the formula was changed.

“When I had the honour of seeing the king,” he would say on every occasion.

The good fellow had in truth accomplished this pilgrimage, a real sacrifice of time and money for a working man, and never did Hadji returning from Mecca bring back a more dazzling impression. The interview had, indeed, been short. To the faithful subjects introduced into his presence, the pretender had said: “Ah, here you are!” And not one of them had found a word in reply to this affable greeting; Méraut less than the others, for, suffocated by emotion and tears, he had not even

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been able to distinguish the features of the idol. However, as they were leaving, the Duc d'Athis, comptroller of the household, had interrogated him at some length on the state of feeling in France; and it is easy to imagine how the fanatical weaver, who had never quitted the *Enclos de Rey*, answered:

“Let him come, let him come quickly, our King Henri. We are all thirsting and pining for him!”

Whereupon, the Duc d'Athis, delighted at this valuable information, thanked him a great deal, and abruptly inquired:

“Have you any children, Master Méraut?”

“I have three, Monsieur le Duc.”

“Boys?”

“Yes, three children,” repeated the old burgher (for in those parts girls were not counted).

“Very well. I have put that down. His Royal Highness will remember them when the time comes.”

Whereupon the duke had taken out his pocket-book, and *cra, cra*. This *cra, cra*, by which the worthy fellow described his patron's gesture in taking down the names of his three sons, invariably formed part of the narrative that had become one of the family annals, touching in its faithful repetition. Henceforth, whenever work was at a standstill, and his wife betrayed any anxiety at her husband's failing health, or diminution of their little savings, this *cra, cra*, was considered a sufficient answer to calm all her fears.

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“Don't be uneasy! The Duc d'Athis has made a note of it.”

Suddenly grown ambitious for his sons, the old weaver, seeing that the two elder were already started in life on the old family lines, transferred all his hopes of grandeur to Elysée. He was sent to the Papel school, kept by one of those Spanish refugees who invaded the southern towns of France after the capitulation of Marotto. The establishment was situated in the quarter *des Boucheries*, in a tumble-down house, grown mouldy in the shadow of the cathedral, and revealing its state by the mildewed windows and crevices of its walls. It was reached through a network of narrow, slimy, dirty streets, between rows of shops bristling with gratings and iron hooks, on which hung enormous quarters of meat, surrounded by an unwholesome buzzing of flies. When, later on in life, Elysée recalled those days, it always seemed to him as though he had passed his childhood in the Middle Ages, under the rod and knotted rope of some terrible fanatic, in a gloomy and sordid class-room, where the Latin verbs were only interrupted by the neighbouring bells ringing their blessings or curses over the apse of the old church, over its carved, foliated scroll-work, and strange, weird gargoyles. Papel, a little man with an enormous greasy countenance, shaded by a dingy-white cap rammed down upon his eyes to hide a big, swollen,

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blue vein that divided his forehead, resembled a dwarf in one of Velasquez's pictures, minus the bright tunic and the bronzing of time. Withal, brutal and cruel, his large skull contained a prodigious store of ideas, a living and luminous encyclopædia, locked, so to speak, by a stubborn royalism laid like an iron bar across his brows, and which, indeed, seemed physically revealed by the abnormal swelling of the curious vein on his forehead.

It was a common report in the town, that the name of Papel was assumed to hide another and more notorious one, that of a *cabecilla* of Don Carlos, famous for his mode of waging war, and for the ingenuity of his methods for inflicting death. Living so near the Spanish frontier, his shameful celebrity inconvenienced him and necessitated his living under an assumed name. What truth was there in this story? Elysée, during the many years he spent at the school, and although he was Monsieur Papel's favourite pupil, never heard the terrible dwarf pronounce a single word, nor receive a single visit or letter that could confirm his suspicions. Only, when the child became a man, when he had finished his studies, and the *Enclos de Rey* had become too cramped a space for his laurels, diplomas, and the paternal ambition, when it was decided to send him to Paris, Monsieur Papel gave him several letters of introduction to



the leaders of the Legitimist party, weighty letters indeed, sealed with mysterious coats of arms, which seemed to confirm the legend of the disguised *cabecilla*.

Master Méraut had insisted on this journey, for he began to think that the king was delaying his return too long. He made every sacrifice, sold his gold watch, his wife's silver chain, and his little vineyard, the patrimony of every burgher, and this he did simply, heroically, for his party.

"Just go and see what they are about," said he to his youngest son, "what they are waiting for? *L'enclos* is getting weary of waiting for ever."

Elysée Méraut arrived therefore in Paris at the age of twenty, brimful of ardent convictions, in which the blind devotion of his father was augmented by the militant fanaticism of his Spanish master.

He was received by the Legitimist party very much like a traveller who gets into a first-class carriage



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in the middle of the night, at some bye station, when all the previous occupiers are already comfortably settled for the night. The intruder, his blood warmed by the sharp air and rapid walking, longs to talk, move, and prolong his wakefulness; but he is greeted by the surly and somnolent bad humour of the other passengers, snugly ensconced in their furs, lulled by the motion of the train, who have even drawn the little blue curtain over the lamp, and who, heavy with sleep and drowsy warmth, dread both the draught and the intruder.

Such was the aspect presented by the Legitimist clan under the Empire; shunted travellers on an abandoned siding.

This black-eyed fanatic, with his thin leonine head, punching out each syllable he uttered, emphasizing each phrase by an energetic gesture, possessing within himself, ready for any occasion, all the dash of Suleau and daring of Cadoudal, struck the party with a mixed feeling of terror and astonishment. He was put down as a dangerous, restless fellow. Beneath the exaggerated politeness and hypocritical appearance of interest that good breeding can so easily assume, Elysée, with the clear-sightedness which a southern Frenchman ever retains, even in the midst of his most passionate excitement, Elysée quickly discerned all the selfish low cunning of these men. According to them there was nothing to be done for the present;

nothing but to wait quietly, above all to cultivate calm, and avoid all excitement and juvenile enthusiasm. "Look at Monseigneur, what an example he sets us!" And these cautious and prudent words were in admirable keeping with the old mansions of the noble *Faubourg*, muffled up in ivy, deaf to the bustle of the streets, wadded with idleness and comfort behind the massive gates, heavy with the weight of time and traditions. Politely, they invited him to two or three political meetings held in great mystery, with all sorts of fears and precautions, in one of these retreats full of venomous spite. There he met the bearers of the great names illustrious in the Vendean wars, and the massacre of Quiberon; the whole list of those inscribed on the *champ des martyrs*, now borne by nice old clean-shaved gentlemen, sleek as prelates in their broadcloth, whose unctuous voices seemed heavy and sticky with luscious sweetmeats. They would arrive with the air of conspirators, all of them fancying they were followed by the police, who, in truth, made fun of these platonic appointments.

When they had settled down under the discreet shades of their tall wax-candles, bending their bald heads as shiny as ivory counters, some one would impart news of Frohsdorf, and they would admire the unalterable patience of the exile, and encourage one another to imitate it. In a low whisper, hush!

They repeated Monsieur de Barentin's last pun on the Empress, or hummed in an undertone the song: "*Quand Napoléon—vous donnant les étrivières—aura tout de bon—endommagé vos derrières.*"* Then terrified at their own audacity, the conspirators would leave one by one, slipping along the walls of the wide and deserted rue de Varennes, which re-echoed with the alarming sound of their timorous steps.

Elysée soon discovered that he was too young and too active for these ghosts of former days. Moreover France was then basking in the full sunshine of the Imperial epopee; and the regiments returning from the Italian war were flying their victorious eagles under the decked-out windows of the boulevards.

The old burgher's son was not long in finding out that the opinion of *l'Enclos de Rey* was not that of all France, and that the King's return would not be so speedy as they fancied at his home. His royalism remained staunch, but now that action had become impossible, it expanded into an ideal that was broader and nobler even than the reality. He conceived the project of writing a book, a book in which his convictions and hopes, all that he wished to say and propagate, would stand revealed to that great Paris he longed to convince. His

* When Napoleon, with a horse-whipping, shall, once for all, have damaged your breeches.

plan was at once made : he would gain his daily bread by giving lessons—he soon found as many pupils as he wished—and he would write his book in his leisure moments, and bestow on it all the time it would require.

Like all Southerners, Elysée Méraut was above all a man of speech and gesture. Ideas only came to him standing, at the sound of his own voice, as the peal of bells attracts lightning. Strengthened by reading, by facts, by constant meditation, his thoughts, which flowed from his lips in gushing streams, words following words in sonorous eloquence, from his pen fell slowly, drop by drop, as though coming from too vast a reservoir for such slow filtration and for the refinements of written composition.

It was a relief to him to give speech, since he found no other means of communicating his convictions. He therefore seized every opportunity of speaking, in the cafés, at conferences, more especially however in the cafés of the Quartier Latin, where alone in the crouching Paris of the second Empire, when books and newspapers were gagged, opposition was carried on. Every drinking shop had at that time its orator, its great man. It was then said : “Pesquidoux of the Café Voltaire is very powerful, but Larminat of the Procope is even more so.” In fact, these cafés were crowded with well-educated and eloquent youths, whose minds

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were filled with noble ideas, and who revived, with even more spirit, the glorious political and philosophical discussions carried on in the taverns at Bonn and Heidelberg.

In these creative centres of ideas, smoky and noisy, where, if shouting was great, drinking was still greater ; the strange enthusiasm of this tall, ever-excited Gascon, who did not smoke, and was intoxicated without drink, his picturesque and brutal eloquence expressing opinions as old-fashioned as powder and panniers—as discordant with the surroundings in which they were exposed, as an antiquarian amid trumpery gewgaws ;—soon procured Elysée both a reputation and an audience.

At the hour when the gas is flaring in the crammed and bustling cafés, when his thin lanky form was discerned crossing the threshold, his short-sighted and rather wild eyes seeming in an effort of vision to toss back his hair and hat, and a book or review with an enormous paper cutter ever under his arm, a shout of welcome would greet him : “ Here comes Méraut ! ” And all crowded together to give him elbow room and space enough to gesticulate freely. These acclamations, this youthful enthusiasm, the heat and light, the heady intoxicating light of the gas, all contributed to excite him. Every topic, whether culled from the day’s paper or an open book, glanced at as he passed under the arcades of the Odéon, served as a

theme ; and he dashed off on his subject, seated or standing, holding his audience spellbound with his voice, grouping his public by a gesture. The domino players stopped, the billiard players upstairs hung over the banisters, pipe in mouth, ivory cue in hand. The window-panes, the glasses,



the saucers rattled as if a post-chaise were dashing by, and the mistress of the establishment seated at her desk would say proudly to the new-comers : “Come in quick, we have Monsieur Méraut !” Ah ! Pesquidoux and Larminat might be as powerful and eloquent as they could, he, Elysée, was more than a match for them. He became the orator of the Quartier Latin. This glory that he had not

sought sufficed for him, and unfortunately arrested his steps towards fame. Such was the fate of many a Larminat of that period ;—great powers were wasted—like a powerful machine uselessly and noisily lets off its steam through some defect in the regulator. With Elysée, there was yet another cause : devoid of intrigue or ambition, this Southerner, who had brought from his country nothing but the fervour of his convictions, considered himself the missionary of his own political faith, and he did in truth display the indefatigable proselytism, the strong independent nature of a missionary, the disinterestedness that disdains fees and fat livings and prefers the hard and dangerous life of mission-work.

Assuredly, during the eighteen years that he had been scattering broadcast his ideas among the youth of Paris, more than one who had made his way, and who now said with contempt : “ Oh, yes ! Méraut, an old student ! ” had derived the best part of his fame, from the crumbs that this singular fellow had carelessly dropped at many a table. Elysée knew it well, and when he found under the green coat of an academician one of his chimerical ideas toned down in a well-turned phrase, he was happy, with the unselfish affection of a father who sees the daughters of his love richly married, and yet lays no claim to their affection. It was the chivalrous abnegation of the old weaver of the



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*Enclos de Rey*, with something nobler added to it, since he lacked confidence in the success of the cause he served—a confidence which old Méraut retained unshaken to the very last. The day before his death—for he died almost suddenly from a sunstroke, after one of his open-air dinners—the old man still sang at the top of his voice: “Vive Henri IV.” And at the last moment, when his eyes were already dim, and his speech dull, he still repeated to his wife: “Quite easy about children—Duc d’Athis—made a note.” And with his dying hands he strove to write “*cra—cra*” on the sheet.

When Elysée, warned too late of this sudden blow reached his home, his father lay already stiff and cold, his hands folded across his breast, on the bed which stood against the wall of the room still waiting for its new paper. Through the door of the workshop, which had been left open for Death, who scatters, loosens and widens all around him, Elysée saw the silent looms; his father’s, now forsaken, like a stranded vessel against which the wind was henceforth powerless; then the king’s portrait and the red seal which had presided over this laborious and faithful life; and overhead, high above the *Enclos de Rey*, rising up in bustling tiers on the hill, the old mills ever standing, uplifting their wings against the clear sky, like signals of despair. Never did Elysée forget the sight of that

serene death, cutting off the humble workman at his post, and closing his eyes upon his familiar horizon. He was seized with a longing for death, he who was yet filled with dreams of adventure, he who was the living embodiment of the fantastic illusions of the fine old man sleeping there.

It was after his return from this sad journey, that he was offered the post of tutor at the Court of X——. His disappointment had been so great, the petty meannesses, jealousies, and envious slanders in the midst of which he had found himself; the painted pageantry of monarchy seen too close, from the side-scenes, had so saddened him, that, notwithstanding his admiration for the King of Illyria, after the first fever of enthusiasm had cooled and the monks had left, he regretted having accepted so quickly. The recollection of all the annoyances he had undergone in his previous post returned to him, with a feeling of the sacrifice he must make of his liberty and habits. Then his book, that famous book ever seething in his brain! In short, after a long self-debate, he resolved on refusing; and on Christmas Day, when the interview was at hand, he wrote to Father Melchoir to announce his decision. The monk did not remonstrate; he merely wrote the following lines:

“Come this evening to the rue des Fourneaux for the night service. I hope to convince you.”

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The Franciscan convent of the rue des Fourneaux, where Father Melchoir held the office of treasurer, is one of the most curious and unknown corners of Catholic Paris. This mother-house of a celebrated order, mysteriously hidden amid the wretched suburb that swarms and grovels behind the Montparnasse railway-station, is also called "the Commissariat of the Holy Sepulchre." Here it is that monks of strange and foreign appearance, their travelling-robe mingling with the profound poverty of the district, bring—for the trade in relics—bits of the true Cross, chaplets of olive stones from the Garden of Olives, roses of Jericho dry and fibrous, awaiting a drop of consecrated water, a whole cargo of miraculous goods which in the vast invisible pockets of the brethren changed into good sound coin, heavy and mute, that afterwards found its way to Jerusalem to keep in order the Holy Sepulchre. Elysée had been first brought to the rue des Fourneaux by a sculptor who was his friend, a poor artist struggling in a garret, named Dreux, who had just executed for the convent a Sainte Marguerite d'Ossuna, and who took as many people as possible to see his statue. The place was so curious and picturesque, harmonized so thoroughly with the convictions of the Southerner by linking them—thus saving them from modern clearness of thought—to the most remote centuries and countries endeared to him by tradition, that he often returned thither to the great

joy of friend Dreux, proud, indeed, of the success of his Marguerite.

It was nearly midnight on the evening of the rendezvous when Elysée Méraut quitted the swarming streets of the Latin Quartier ; from the general air of festivity of the Boulevard Saint Michel and the rue Racine, reeking with the odours of the cook shops and beribboned pork butchers, the provision stalls and taverns served by women, the students' lodgings, and the glaring liquor bars, he emerged into the melancholy of the deserted avenues where the passers by, dwarfed by the reflections from the gas lamps, seemed to crawl rather than to walk. The feeble bells of the various religious communities tinkled behind their walls, above which peered the skeletons of trees ; the noise and the warm odour of straw being stirred, of stables wrapped in sleep, came from the great closed yards of the cow-keepers ; and while in the broad street a vague and trampled whiteness showed where the snow had fallen during the day, the burgher's son walked on in the deepest dream of ardent belief, fancying he recognized up above, among the stars sparkling in the cold, that which guided the kings to Bethlehem. As he gazed at this star he recalled the Christmases of former days : the white Christmas of his youth, celebrated at the Cathedral, and the return through the streets of the butchers' quarter—fantastic with the outlines of roofs against the moonlight—towards the family

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table in the *Enclos de Rey* where the Christmas supper awaited them ; the traditional three candles set amid the scarlet dotted holly, the *estevenons* (little Christmas cakes), smelling deliciously of hot dough and the fried bacon. So well did he enwrap himself in these family recollections, that the lantern of a dustman passing along the pavement seemed to him that which was wont to swing from father Méraut's hand as he marched at the head of the party returning from these midnight masses.

Alas ! poor father, he would never more see him ! And while he held secret communion with these dear familiar shades, Elysée reached the rue des Fourneaux, a scarcely finished suburb, lighted by one lamp, made up of long factory buildings, overtopped by tall chimneys, of wooden hoardings, of walls re-built of old materials. The wind blew violently over the great plains round the city.

From a neighbouring slaughter-house came mournful sounds, dull blows, a sickening smell of blood and fat ; it is here they kill the pigs that are sacrificed to Christmas, as at the sacred feasts of some Teutates.

The gateway of the convent standing in the middle of the street was wide open, and in the court yard were two or three carriages with splendid harness that astonished Méraut. The service had begun ; bursts of music from the organ and of chanting issued from the church, which was nevertheless deserted and in darkness ; the only light

being that from the little lamp on the altar and the pale reflection of the snow on the phantasmagoria of the painted windows. The nave was almost round, adorned with great banners from Jerusalem bearing the red cross which hung from the walls, and with somewhat barbaric coloured statues ; in the midst of which Marguerite d'Ossuna in pure marble, pitilessly scourged her white shoulders, for—as the monks said with a certain coquetry—"Marguerite was a great sinner belonging to our order."

The ceiling of painted wood crossed by a network of small timbers, the high altar beneath a sort of canopy supported by columns ; the semi-circle of the choir surrounded by the woodwork of the empty stalls with a ray of moonlight lying across the open page of the plain-song book, all this was indistinctly seen ; but by a great staircase concealed beneath the choir, was the descent into the crypt, where—perhaps as a reminiscence of the catacombs—the service was being held.

Quite at the end of the vault, in the white masonry supported by great Roman columns was a reproduction of the tomb of Christ at Jerusalem, with its low doorway, the narrow interior lighted by a quantity of little funereal lamps, blinking—from the depths of their stony cells—on a Christ in coloured wax, the size of life, his bleeding wounds showing brightly scarlet where the shroud fell apart. At the other end of the crypt, as a singular antithesis, resuming in itself the whole Christian

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epopee, was displayed one of those childish reproductions of the Nativity, of which the manger, the animals, and the child begarlanded with bright colours and greenery in curled paper, are drawn each year from the stock of legends, just as they emerged of yore, more rudely shaped no doubt, but much larger, from the brain of some visionary.

Now as then, a group of children and old women, with an eager craving for love and the marvellous—the poor whom Christ loved—crowded round the manger. Among them, to Elysée's surprise, in the front row of these humble and faithful souls, two men in well-cut clothes, two elegant women in dark costumes, knelt lowly on the bare flags, one of them holding a little boy around whom she wrapped her two folded arms with a gesture of protection and prayer.

"They are queens!" an old woman said to him in a whisper, breathless with admiration.

Elysée started. Then, drawing nearer, he recognised the delicate profile and aristocratic appearance of Christian of Illyria, and near him the brown, bony head, and still youthful but bald forehead, of the King of Palermo. Of the two women nothing could be seen but the black and auburn hair and the attitude of passionately adoring motherhood. Ah! how well the wily priest, who had thus dramatically arranged the first interview between the young prince and his future tutor, how well he knew Méraut. These dethroned kings

coming to offer their homage to God, who to receive it seemed to have concealed himself in this crypt, this assemblage of fallen royalty and religion in distress, the sad star of the exile guiding these impoverished Magi, without retinue and empty-handed towards a suburban Bethlehem, all this swelled his heart to suffocation. The child above all touched him, with his little head bent towards the animals of the manger, the curiosity natural to his age, tempered by a reserve born of suffering. And before this childish brow, wherein the future already lay hid like the butterfly in its golden chrysalis, Elysée fell to thinking how much science, how much tender care would be needed to make it bloom into splendour.







### III.

#### THE COURT AT SAINT-MANDÉ.

THE temporary arrangement at the *Hôtel des Pyramides* had lasted three months, then six months, with the half-unpacked trunks, the half-unstrapped bags, all the disorder and uncertainty of a camping out. Every day excellent news arrived from Illyria. In a new soil, deprived of roots, without a past or a hero, the Republic gained no ground. The people were tired of it, regretted their princes, and calculations of infallible certainty were brought to the exiles, saying: "Hold yourselves in readiness. Tomorrow will be the day." Not a nail was put into the walls, not a piece of furniture was moved, without the hopeful exclamation: "It is scarcely worth while." Nevertheless, the exile became

prolonged, and the Queen was not slow to understand that this sojourn in an hotel amid a host of strangers, a flight of birds of passage of all kinds, was gradually becoming derogatory to the dignity of their rank. The tent was therefore struck, a house was bought, and they settled down. From a nomad the exile became a settler.

It was at Saint-Mandé, on the Avenue Daumesnil, at the top of the rue Herbillon, in that part which skirts the wood and is bordered with elegant buildings, smart iron-work railings affording glimpses of well-kept gardens with gravel paths, rounded flights of steps, lawns of close turf that gave the spot the appearance of a corner of the avenue of the Bois de Boulogne. In one of these houses the King and Queen of Palermo, comparatively poor, had already sought refuge and seclusion from the turmoil of the luxurious quarters of the fashionable world. The Duchess of Malines, sister of the Queen of Palermo, had come to join her at Saint-Mandé, and the two easily induced their cousin to settle in the neighbourhood. Putting aside all question of friendship, Frédérique wished to stand aloof from the light-hearted merriment and festivity of Paris, to protest against modern society and the prosperity of the Republic, and to avoid the curiosity attaching to well-known figures, which seemed to her an insult to their fallen fortunes. The king had at first raised an outcry

at the distance of their habitation from the rest of the world, but soon he found it a convenient pretext for long absences and tardy returns. Finally, to crown all, living was cheaper there than elsewhere, and their usual comfort could be maintained at little expense.

The establishment was comfortable. The white house, three stories high, flanked by two turrets, overlooked the wood across the trees of its little park, while facing the rue Herbillon, between the offices and the conservatories opposite each other, was a great gravelled courtyard to which descended the door-steps, surmounted by a marquee supported like a tent by two long lances. In the stable were ten horses, riding and carriage horses—the Queen rode every day—the liveried servants wore the Illyrian colours, powdered and bag-wigged; and a hall porter, whose halberd and golden shoulder belt were as legendary at Saint-Mandé and at Vincennes as the wooden leg of old Daumesnil; gave to all a suitable air of luxury and comfort. In truth it was scarcely more than a year since Tom Levis had improvised with all its decorations and accessories, the princely scenario whereon is to be played the historic drama we have to relate.

Yes, indeed! Tom Levis. Notwithstanding misgivings and repugnance, it had been necessary to have recourse to him. The little fat man was of surprising elasticity and tenacity. He had so

many tricks, so many keys and jemmies to unlock or force all doors, however unwilling or resisting the lock, without counting the innumerable dodges peculiar to himself for gaining the goodwill of the tradesmen, the valets and the women-servants ! “Above all, have nothing to do with Tom Levis.” That was what everyone said to begin with. But then nothing got on. The tradesmen did not deliver their wares at the promised time, the servants rebelled, until the day when the man in the cab, with his gold-rimmed spectacles and his heavy watch-chain appeared, and then the hangings fell down of themselves from the ceilings and trailed upon the parquet floors, draped themselves into complicated arrangements of portières, curtains, or decorative carpets. The stoves lighted themselves, the camellias grew and blossomed in the conservatory, and the proprietors, quickly installed, had nothing further to do than to enjoy life and await on the comfortable seats in the drawing room, the bundle of bills which would arrive from all corners of Paris. In the rue Herbillon it was old Rosen, comptroller of the civil and military household, who received the accounts, paid the servants, managed the king’s little fortune, and this so cleverly, that within this gilded frame allowed to their misfortune, Christian and Frédérique still lived handsomely. Kings both of them, children of kings, they knew nothing of the

price of things, and were only used to see themselves in effigy on all the gold pieces, or to coin money according to their good pleasure. Far from being therefore astonished at their affluence, they felt on the contrary everything that was missing in their new existence, to say nothing of the chilly void

that a fallen crown leaves around heads accustomed to wear it. The house at Saint-Mandé, so simple outside, had in vain adorned itself like a little palace in the interior; the queen's room exactly recalled



that of the castle of Leybach, with its hangings of blue silk damask and old Bruges; while the prince's study was an exact copy of that he had left behind him; and on the staircase were reproductions of the statues in their royal residence, and in the conservatory a warm monkey-house, adorned with climbing creepers for the favourite marmosets. What were all these little details of delicate flattery to the

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possessors of four historic castles, and of those summer residences hanging between sky and sea, the lawns running down to meet the waves, in the green isles called "the gardens of the Adriatic."

At Saint-Mandé, the Adriatic was represented by the little pond in the wood that the queen overlooked from her windows, and gazed at as sadly as the exiled Andromache upon the false Simoïs. However restricted their mode of life, it occurred to Christian, more experienced than Frédérique, to wonder at this relative comfort.

"Rosen is a wonderful fellow. I really do not know how he manages to do everything with the very little money we have."

Then he would add laughing :

"We may be very sure, however, that not a penny comes out of his own pocket !"

The fact is, that in Illyria, Rosen was synonymous with *Harpagon*. Even in Paris, the fame for stinginess had followed the duke, and was confirmed by the marriage of his son, a marriage arranged by a matrimonial agency and that all the pretty charms of the little Sauvadon could not prevent from being a sordid mésalliance. Rosen nevertheless was rich. The old Pandour who carried all his instincts of rapine and pillage written on his bird of prey face, had not made war against the Turks and Montenegrins solely for love of glory. After each campaign his waggons returned full,

and the splendid mansion he occupied at the extremity of the Ile Saint-Louis, close to the Hotel Lambert, was overflowing with precious things, oriental hangings, furniture of the middle ages, triptydes of massive gold, sculptures, reliquaries, materials embroidered and splangled with gold, the spoil of convents or harems, piled up in a suite of immense reception-rooms opened only once, for the marriage of Herbert and the fairy-like fête then provided by old Uncle Sauvadon ; but which since that day hoarded their wealth in the mournful locked-up rooms, behind drawn curtains and closed shutters, not even having to fear the indiscretion of a single sunbeam. Here the old man led the existence of an eccentric, confined to one floor of the vast hotel, restricting himself to two servants as his whole establishment and to the fare of a provincial miser ; while the great kitchens in the basement with their motionless spits and unheated ovens remained as hermetically closed as the gala apartments above.

The arrival of his sovereigns, the nomination of all the Rosens to the appointments of the tiny court, had slightly modified the old duke's habits. In the first place the young people had come to live with him, their house in the Parc Monceaux—a real modern cage with gilt bars—being too far from Vincennes. Every morning at nine o'clock, no matter what the weather, the princess Colette was in readiness for the queen when she rose ; and got

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into the carriage with the general in that river-side fog, that winter and summer mornings alike leave floating about the point of the island—like a veil upon the enchanted scenery of the Seine. At this hour, Prince Herbert tried to regain a little of the sleep foregone in the somewhat arduous night duty imposed by King Christian, who, having ten years of provincial life and conjugal curfew to make up for, found it so difficult to tear himself away from the charms of nocturnal Paris, that when the theatres and cafés were closed and he had left the club, he thought it delightful to wander along the deserted boulevards, dry and echoing, or shining with rain, between the line of the gas lamps, that like a guard of fire marked the edge of the long perspective.

The instant she arrived at Saint-Mandé, Colette went to the queen's apartments. The duke, on his side, settled himself in a small pavilion communicating with the offices, convenient alike for the tradespeople and the servants. It was called the steward's office ; and it was touching to see the old giant seated in his leather chair, surrounded by files of papers of all kind and bill cases, receiving and settling petty accounts—he who formerly had under his orders a whole tribe of gold-braided underlings. Such was his avarice that, though he was not making payments on his own account, every feature of his face would contract with pain each time he



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must part with money—there was a nervous movement of every wrinkle as if they had been pulled together with the string of a money-bag—his stiff and erect body seemed to protest, as did even the automatic gesture with which he opened the safe let into the wall. Notwithstanding everything, he managed to be always ready, and, with the modest resources of the Prince of Illyria, to provide for the waste inevitable in a large house, for the queen's charities, for the king's gifts, even for his pleasures, no light addition to the budget ; for Christian II. had kept faith with himself and was spending his period of exile right merrily. An assiduous attendant of all Parisian festivities, welcomed in the best clubs, sought after in the drawing-rooms, his delicate and sarcastic profile, appearing in the animated confusion of a "first night," or the tumultuous crowd of a race course, had taken its place henceforward among the faces known to "all Paris," between the extravagant head-dress of a fashionable actress, and the bleared features of that royal prince in disgrace, who haunts the cafés of the boulevards while waiting for the hour to strike that shall make him king. Christian led the idle and yet busy life of the gilded youth of the day. In the afternoon there was the tennis-court or the skating rink, then the Bois, later on a visit to a certain smart boudoir where the extreme luxury and the excessive liberty of speech pleased him. In the

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evening, the lighter theatres, the green room, the club, and, above all, the gambling table, the handling of the cards revealing all his Bohemian origin, with its passion for chance and all its wonderful presentiments. He scarcely ever went out with the queen, except on Sunday to accompany her to the church of Saint-Mandé, and only saw her at meal times. He felt in awe of this upright and reasonable nature, always ruled by a sense of duty, and whose contemptuous coldness embarrassed him like a visible conscience. It was a recall to the kingly responsibilities and ambitions that he would fain forget ; and too weak to revolt openly against this silent dominion, he preferred to fly from it, to lie and so avoid it. On her side, Frédérique knew but too well this Slave temperament, ardent yet yielding, fragile and easily moved ; she had so often had to pardon the escapades of this child-man, who retained all the characteristics of childhood : the grace, the laughter, even childhood's cruel caprice ; she had so often seen him on his knees before her, after one of those follies in which he had risked his dignity and his happiness, that she was completely out of heart with him, both as husband and as man, though there did still remain to her some regard for him as king. This struggle had lasted nearly ten years, although outwardly they had seemed a most united couple. In these exalted circles, with vast suites of apartments,

numerous servants, the ceremonial which makes distances greater and suppresses display of sentiment, this kind of deceit is possible. But exile was about to betray the truth.

Frédérique had at first hoped that this hard trial might ripen the king's mind, awake within him those noble feelings of revolt that make the hero and the conqueror. But on the contrary, she could see in his eyes a growing intoxication of festivities and excitement, created by the life in Paris, by its diabolic will-o'-the-wisp, by the incognito, the temptations and the facilities for pleasure. Ah ! if she had been willing to follow him, to share his mad career through the Parisian whirlwind, cause her beauty, her horses, her toilettes to be quoted, to lend all the coquetry of a woman to the frivolous vanity of the husband, a reconciliation might have been possible. But she remained more queen than ever, abdicating nothing of her ambitions, her hopes, and, from afar, still eagerly taking part in the struggle, sending letter upon letter to the royal adherents, protesting, conspiring, representing the iniquity of their misfortune to every court in Europe. The councillor Boscovich wrote from her dictation ; and at noon, when the king came down, she herself presented the letters for his signature. He signed ; he would sign anything she liked, but with an ironic twitch at the corner of his mouth. The scepticism of his jesting and chilly surroundings had infected him ; to the illusions with which

he had started had succeeded, by a reaction common to these extreme natures, a formal conviction that the exile would be indefinitely prolonged. Thus he imported an air of fatigue, of utter ennui, into the conversations in which Frédérique tried to raise him to the same fever height as herself, and vainly sought in the depths of his eye the attention she could not succeed in fixing. Absent, haunted by some foolish chorus, there ran for ever in his head a vision of the last night's amusement, the intoxicated and languid bewilderment of pleasure. And what an "ouf" of relief escaped him when he could at length get away, what a renewal of youth and life, that each time left the queen more lonely and more sad.

After this work of writing in the morning, the despatch of some of those short and eloquent notes, in which she revived the courage and the devotion of those about to waver, Frédérique's only amusements were readings chosen among the royal library of books, composed of memoirs, correspondences, chronicles of the past or works of high religious philosophy. Then she had the child's games in the garden, and some rides in the Bois de Vincennes, rides but rarely prolonged to that border of the forest where may be heard the last echoes of Parisian noise, where the vast misery of the suburb draws towards its verge; for Paris caused her an antipathy, and unconquerable alarm. Scarcely once a month, would she go in state, to

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make her round of visits among the exiled princes. She started without pleasure, and returned discouraged. Beneath these royal misfortunes, decently and nobly borne, she felt the underlying abandonment, complete renunciation, exile accepted, undergone with patience, grown into a habit, concealed and cheated by manias, childish fancies or worse.

The most dignified and proud of all these fallen majesties, the King of Westphalia, a poor, blind old man, who with his daughter, a fair-haired Antigone, was a touching sight, kept up the pomp and outward seeming of his rank, but no longer occupied himself with anything but the collection of snuff-boxes, and the setting up of glass-cases full of curiosities in his drawing-room ; a singular jesting at the infirmity which prevented him from the full enjoyment of his treasures. In the King of Palermo was the same apathetic renunciation, complicated by mourning, melancholy, want of money, a disunited household, all ambition killed by the death of the only child. The king, nearly always absent, left his wife to her widowed and exiled hearth ; while the Queen of Galicia, extravagant, adoring pleasure, made no change in her turbulent habits of exotic sovereign ; and the Duke of Palma from time to time unslung his carbine in an attempt to cross the frontier, which each time threw him back on the miserable idleness of his life. In reality, he was far more of a

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brigand than a pretender, waging war in order to obtain money and women, and making known to his unfortunate duchess all the emotions endured by the wretched girl married to one of those Pyrenean bandits, who, if they delay their return till daylight, are brought home upon a bier. All these dethroned beings had but one word on their lips, one device to replace the high-sounding mottoes of their royal houses: "Why do anything? Of what use?" To the active fervour of Frédérique, to her outbursts, the more polite replied by a smile; the women answered by talking of religion, the theatre, flirtation, or fashions; and, little by little, this tacit lowering of a principle, this disintegration of forces, gained upon the haughty Dalmatian herself. Between this king who no longer wished to be one, and the poor little, backward Zara, who grew so slowly towards manhood, she was overcome by the feeling of her own impotence. Old Rosen said nothing, and was shut up all day in his office. The princess was but a bird, occupied all day in smoothing its plumage; Boscovich, a child; the marquise, a simpleton. There was Father Alphée, but this rough and stern monk could never have comprehended the doubts hinted in the queen's conversation, and the fears that began to steal upon her. The season had something to do with it too. The woods of Saint-Mandé, that in summer were all greenery and flowers, calm and deserted as a park

during the week, on Sunday swarming with a joyous population ; took, in the approaching winter, in the mournfulness of misty and wet horizons, in the fog ever floating over its lake, the desolate and piteous aspect peculiar to forsaken haunts of pleasure. Flocks of crows flew above the black bushes, above the great gnarled trees, to which magpies' nests and hoary bunches of mistletoe clung, swinging on their leafless summits. It was the second winter Frédérique had passed in Paris. Why did it seem to her so much longer, so-much more gloomy than the other ? Was it the bustle of the hotel that she missed ? The busy movement of the rich and ever restless city ? No. But in proportion as the queen diminished within her, the weaknesses of the woman overcame her, the troubles of the neglected wife, the nostalgia of the stranger torn from her native land.

In the glass gallery forming an annex to the great reception-room, she had made a little winter garden, a comfortable nook removed from all domestic noises, decorated with bright hangings, and green foliaged plants in all the corners, and here she now often remained for whole days, doing nothing, gazing at the rain-soaked garden and the network of slender branches streaking the grey horizon, like an etching, with a mixture of the deep winter evergreen that the holly and yew pre-

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serve even beneath the snow, through the whiteness of which their sharp branches pierce a way.

On the three basins of the fountain, placed one above the other, the sheets of falling water assumed tones of frosted silver, and beyond the high ironwork running beside the Avenue Daumesnil, the silence and the solitude of the two leagues of wood was occasionally broken by the passage of the steam tramways, whistling as they went, their long line of smoke trailing far behind them, dispersing so slowly in the heavy yellow atmosphere that Frédérique could follow it for a long time and see it lose itself little by little, slow and aimless like her own life.

It was on a rainy winter morning that Elysée Méraut gave his first lesson to the royal child in this tiny nook, the home and shelter of the queen's sadness and her dreams, which on this day assumed the aspect of a school-room. Books, exercise books spread on the table, a shaded light like that of a work or class-room, the mother in a simple close-fitting dress of black cloth that set off her tall figure, a little lacquer work-table wheeled in front of her, and the master and pupil, one as nervous and hesitating as the other, over this their first interview. The little prince vaguely recognized the great fiery head that had been pointed out to him on Christmas eve in the dim religious light of the chapel, which his imagination, crowded with the fairy tales of Madame de Silvis, had assimilated to



some apparition of the giant Robistor or the enchanter Merlin. And the impression left upon Elysée was as chimeric and fantastic ; for on his part, he imagined he saw in this delicate little boy, sickly and prematurely old, his forehead already lined as if it bore the whole six hundred years of



his race—a predestined chief, a leader of men and of nations, and he said to him gravely, in a voice that trembled :—

“ Monseigneur, you will be a king some day. You must learn what a king is. Listen to me, look at me well, and what my lips may not explain clearly enough, the respect of my glance will teach you.”

Then, bending over this diminutive intelligence, seeking words and figures of speech to suit its grasp, he explained to him the dogma of divine right, of a king's mission upon the earth, standing between God and the people, charged with responsibilities and duties that other men have not, and which are imposed upon him from infancy. That the little prince understood what was said to him is not altogether probable ; perhaps he felt himself encircled by that vivifying warmth with which gardeners, tending a rare plant, surround the delicate fibre, the weakly shoot. As for the queen, bending over her embroidery, she listened with an exquisitely delighted surprise, as words reached her that she had been despairingly awaiting for many years, which answered to her most secret thoughts, calling them forth and rousing them from their torpor : for so long had she dreamed alone ! How many things there were that she had not known how to say, and which Elysée now expressed for her ! In his presence, from the very first day, she felt as an unrecognized musician, an artist who has not found expression, must do before the masterly executant of his work. Her vaguest sentiments upon this grand idea of royalty were so embodied, and so magnificently yet so simply expressed, that a child, quite a young child, could almost comprehend them. While she looked at this man, his great rugged features animated with faith and eloquence ; she saw in strong contrast the pretty

indolent face, the undecided smile of her husband ; she heard the eternal "Of what use?" of all these dethroned kings, the idle gossip of the princely boudoirs. And it was this plebeian, this weaver's son, with whose history she was acquainted, who had gathered up the lost traditions, preserved the relics and the shrine, the sacred fire, of which the flame was visible on his brow at this moment, communicating itself to others in the fervour of his discourse. Ah! if Christian could have been like this, they would still be upon the throne, or else both would have disappeared, buried beneath its ruins. It was singular that in the attention she could not prevent herself from bestowing upon him, Elysée's face brought to her an impression of returning recollection. From what shady place in her memory, from what secret recess of her heart arose this head of genius, these accents that stirred the profoundest depths of her being?

Now the master had set himself to question his pupil, not upon what he knew—nothing alas, or so little!—but to seek out what could be taught him. "Yes, sir; No, sir." The little prince had but these two words ready to his lips, and put all his strength into their pronounciation, with that pretty timidity common to boys brought up by women in a prolongation of their first early childhood. He strove nevertheless, poor little fellow, to unearth from beneath the heap of varied knowledge imparted to him by Madame de Silvis, some few

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notions of general history from among the adventures of dwarfs and fairies that bestarred his little imagination like a stage prepared for a pantomime. From her place the queen encouraged and sustained him, bearing him aloft as it were on her own soul. When swallows take their flight, if the smallest one in the nest does not fly well, it is thus the mother aids it on her own wings. When the child hesitated in his answers, Frédérique's glance, a golden sparkle in sea-green eyes, dulled as the sea does beneath the passing squall ; but, when his reply was correct, it was a beaming smile of triumph she turned upon the master !

For many a month she had not experienced such fulness of joy and comfort. The waxen hue of the little Zara, the depressed physiognomy of the sickly child seemed infused with new blood ; even the landscape gained from the magic of this man's speech, the melancholy foregrounds seeming to fade away and leave in sight only what was grand and imposing in the vast barrenness of winter. And while the queen listened in rapt attention, leaning on her elbow, bending heart and soul towards that future where the child-king appeared to her in the triumph of the return to Leybach, Elysée wondering and trembling at a transfiguration of which he did not know himself to be the cause, beheld above the lovely forehead the sheen of the heavy coils of hair crossing and twisting and encircling the head like a kingly diadem.

Noon struck and the lesson was not yet ended. In the principal drawing-room where the little court assembled every morning at the hour of breakfast, a whispering began, and astonishment pervaded the group when neither king nor queen appeared. Hunger, and the idleness of the moment while waiting for the repast, caused a certain bad humour to mingle with the murmur of the conversations. Boscovich, pale with cold and hunger, who had been searching the copses for the last two hours in the hope of finding some late flowering plant, was thawing his fingers in front of the high white marble chimney, shaped like an altar, on which Father Alphée sometimes said a private mass on Sundays. The Marquise, majestic and stiff, on the edge of a divan, in a green velvet dress, shook her head with a tragic air, at the top of her long thin boa-entwined neck, while she imparted her confidences to the Princess Colette. The poor woman was in despair that her pupil should have been taken away from her and confided to a mere creature—positively a mere creature—she had seen him that morning crossing the courtyard.

“My dear, he would have frightened you ; hair as long as this, the look of a madman. No one but Father Alphée could have made such a find.”

“They say he is very learned,” observed the princess, absently.

The other pounced on her words. Very learned. Very learned ! Did a king’s son require to be

stuffed full of Greek and Latin like a dictionary? "No, no, my dear, these princely educations, you see, require special kinds of knowledge—I had them, I was ready. I had studied the treatise of the Abbé Diguët on the '*Education of a Prince.*' I know by heart the different methods he indicates for knowing men, those for keeping mere flatterers at a distance. There are six of the first, and seven of the second. This is the order in which they come."

She began to repeat them to the princess, who, wearied and sulky, did not listen, but sat on a cushioned ottoman, the long fashionable train of her pale-blue dress lying behind her, and her eyes fixed like loadstones on the door leading to the king's apartment, with the vexed air of a pretty woman who has composed her whole attitude for some one who does not come. Stiff and upright in his closely-buttoned coat, the old Duke de Rosen walked up and down with automatic step, regular as the pendulum of a clock, and occasionally stopping at one or other of the windows overlooking the garden or the courtyard, and standing there, his glance raised from under the lines of his forehead, looked like an officer of the watch in charge of the course and responsible for the safety of the ship. And certainly the aspect of the vessel did him honour. The red brick of the offices, the steward's pavilion, gleamed in the rain that splashed upon the great flight of steps at the door, and upon the fine

gravel of the approach. In the murky daylight it seemed as if a light were reflected within from the mere orderliness of everything, extending even to the great drawing-room still further enlivened by the warmth spread from stoves and carpets, by the Louis XVI. furniture in white and gold, by the classic ornaments reproduced upon the woodwork of the panels and the mirrors, these being very large, on one of which a little gilt dial-piece hung, kept in place by garlands of gilt ribbons. In one corner of the great room, in a glass case, a bracket of the same date supported the diadem saved from the general wreck. Frédérique had wished it should be placed there; "that we may remember!" she said. And notwithstanding Christian's mockery, for he thought it gave the room the air of a museum of royalty, the splendid jewel of the middle ages with its sparkling stones in the old pierced and chased gold-work, threw a note of antique chivalry in the midst of the coquetry of the eighteenth century, and the complex taste of our own.

The sound of familiar wheels on the gravel announced the arrival of the aide-de-camp. At last, here was someone.

"How late you are in coming for orders, Herbert," said the duke, gravely.

The prince, for big fellow as he was, he always trembled before his father, reddened, stammered some excuses: "Awfully sorry—not his fault—on duty all night."

“Is that why the king is not down yet?” asked the princess, drawing near where the two men stood talking, and seeming to poke her dainty nose into their conversation.

A severe glance from the duke closed her mouth. The king’s conduct was not to be criticized by anyone.

“Go to him at once, sir; His Majesty is probably awaiting you.”

Herbert obeyed after having tried in vain to obtain a smile from his much-loved Colette, whose bad temper far from being calmed by his arrival, sent her pouting to her seat, her pretty curls disarranged, and the blue train crumpled by the grasp of her augry hand. Prince Herbert had, nevertheless, endeavoured to transform himself into a smart man during the last few months. His wife had ordained that, in his capacity of aide-de-camp, he must let his moustaches grow, and this gave a formidably martial air to his honest face, thinned and paled by the late hours and fatigue of his service with the king. Moreover, he still limped a little, and walked leaning on his cane like a veritable hero from that siege of Ragusa, of which he had written a memorial, famous even before publication, and that being read by the author one evening at the Queen of Palermo’s, had gained him a brilliant social ovation and the formal promise of a prize from the Academy. Imagine what a position, what authority all this gave to the husband

of Colette! But through it all he preserved his air of simple, timid good-nature, above all before the princess, who continued to treat him with the most graceful contempt, which proves that no man is great in the eyes of his wife.

“Well! What now?” said she in an impertinent tone, when she saw him reappear with an astounded and agitated countenance.

“The king has not yet come home!”

These few words of Herbert produced the effect of an electric discharge in the drawing-room. Colette, very pale, with tears in her eyes, was the first to recover speech:

“Is it possible?”

And the duke in a stern voice added:

“Not come home! How is it I was not told?”

Madame de Silvis’ boa trembled and twisted convulsively.

“I only hope nothing has happened to him!” said the princess, in an extraordinary state of excitement.

Herbert was able to reassure her. Lebeau, the king’s valet, had been gone an hour or more with a portmanteau. He would certainly have news of him.

In the silence that followed, the same disquieting thought hovered over all, which the Duc de Rosen suddenly gave utterance to.

“What will the Queen say?”

To which Boscovich tremblingly suggested:

“ Her Majesty is probably aware of it.”

“ I am sure she is not,” affirmed Colette, “ for the Queen said only a short time ago that she would present the new tutor to the king at breakfast.”

And with a nervous tremour, she added between her teeth but loud enough to be heard by everyone :

“ In her place I know what I should do.”

The duke turned indignantly, with flashing eyes, to this little plebeian, whom he had never been able to make a lady of, and was probably about to give her a sharp lesson on the respect due to monarchy, when the queen appeared, followed by Elysée, who led his royal pupil by the hand. All rose. Frédérique, with a lovely smile of happiness that had long been banished from her face, presented Monsieur Méraut. Oh ! what a bow the Marquise had ready for him, distant, haughty and mocking ; she had been a whole week practising it. The princess, on her part, could scarcely find strength enough for a gesture. From white she turned to crimson, as she recognized in the new master the tall ungainly young man who had breakfasted beside her at her uncle’s and who had written Herbert’s book. Was he there by chance, or by some diabolical machination ? What a disgrace for her husband, what fresh ridicule if his literary cheat were discovered ! She was a little reassured by Elysée’s cold bow, for he must certainly have recognized her. “ He is a clever man,” she thought to herself. Unluckily all was compromised

by the naïveté of Herbert, his stupefied amazement at the tutor's appearance, and the familiar handshake he gave him with a "Good morning, how are you?"

"You know Monsieur, then?" asked the Queen, who had heard through her chaplain of the history of the *Memorial* and smiled a little maliciously.

She was however too kindly to amuse herself long with a cruel sport.

"Decidedly the King has forgotten us," she added, "will you go and tell him, Monsieur de Rosen."

They were obliged to own the truth, that the King was not in the house, that he had passed the night out, and that his portmanteau had been sent for. It was the first time anything of the kind had happened; every one expected an outburst on the part of this proud and passionate nature, all the more that the presence of a stranger aggravated the offence. But no; she remained calm. Merely saying a few words to the aide-de-camp, inquiring the hour at which he had last seen Christian.

About three in the morning. His Majesty was walking down the boulevard with Monseigneur the Prince d'Axel.

"Ah! true, I forgot, they had some matters to talk over."

In these tranquil tones she completely recovered her self-possession. But no one was deceived. Everyone knew the Prince d'Axel and knew

beforehand what kind of conversation there could be with this degraded prince and shady character.

“Let us go to breakfast,” said Frédérique, rallying all her little court with a sovereign gesture to the calm she endeavoured herself to show.

The King not being present to offer his arm, she hesitated for a moment. Then suddenly turning to the Comte de Zara, who with his great eyes and the intelligent look of a precocious and sickly child had been watching all this scene, she said with a deep, tender, almost respectful tone and a grave smile hitherto unknown to him :

“Come, Sire !”





IV.

THE KING TAKES HIS PLEASURE.

THREE o'clock in the morning strikes at the Church of Saint-Louis-en-l'Île.

Enveloped in darkness and silence, the Rosen family mansion sleeps in all the heaviness of its massive old stones sunken down by the weight of years, of its ponderous, arched portals with their venerable knocker ; and behind the closed shutters, the obscured mirrors reflect only the deep sleep of ages, a sleep of which the light paintings on the ceilings seem to be the dreams, and the murmur of the neighbouring river, the fleeting and uneven breath. But the deepest sleep of all in the house,

is that of Prince Herbert, who has returned home from his club only a quarter of an hour ago. Exhausted, broken-down, cursing the harassing existence he is forced to lead, which deprives him of what he loves best on earth, his wife and his horses : horses, because the king does not care for sport or any sort of out-door exercise ; his wife, because the king and queen, living apart and meeting only at the hours of meals, their aide-de-camp and lady-in-waiting must follow in the steps of this conjugal separation, and live aloof from each other like confidants in a tragedy. The Princess goes off to Saint-Mandé long before her husband is awake ; at night, when he returns home, she is fast asleep with her door closed and bolted. And if he complains, Colette majestically answers with a little smile which deepens all her dimples : “ We surely owe this sacrifice to our Princes.” A pretty evasion for the love-sick Herbert, who remains alone in his big room on the first story with a ceiling four yards high above his head, paintings by Boucher over his doors, and great mirrors fitted in the walls which send him back the reflection of his own figure in an interminable perspective.

Sometimes, however, when he is completely done up, as he is to-night, the husband of Colette experiences a certain comfort in stretching himself out in bed without having to furnish any conjugal explanations ; resuming his comfortable bachelor

habits, and to begin with enveloping his head in an enormous silk handkerchief; before the mocking eyes of his little Parisian wife he never would have dared to make such a figure of himself. Hardly is he in bed, his head upon the embroidered and



emblazoned pillow, than the trap of restful oblivion opens, into which rolls the worn-out noctambulist aide-de-camp; but he is suddenly snatched from his beatitude by the disagreeable sensation of a light moving before his eyes, while a little shrill voice, pointed as a gimlet, whispers in his ear:

“Herbert. Herbert.”

“Eh! What! Who is there?”

“Do be quiet. It is I, Colette.”

Yes, it is Colette standing before his bed, her lace dressing-gown open at the throat, short sleeves displaying her arms, her hair turned up and twisted leaving bare the nape of her neck, a perfect little nest of fair curls ; there she stands in the white glimmer of her little lantern, which makes her eyes look larger, widened as they are by a solemn expression, but now suddenly amused as she catches sight of the bewildered Herbert, looking stupid enough with his handkerchief ruffled into menacing points, while his head with its bristling moustaches rose out of his night-gear, voluminous as the raiment of an archangel, making him look like a bourgeois bully surprised out of a bad dream. But the hilarity of the Princess does not last long. Resuming her seriousness, she places her night lamp on the table with the resolute air of a woman who is determined to make a scene ; and without any regard for the prince's continued drowsiness, she folds her arms, her little hands meeting the dimples of her elbows, and begins :

“ Do you really think this sort of life can go on ? Coming home every day at four o'clock in the morning ! Do you think that a proper existence for a married man ? ”

“ But, my dear, (he suddenly interrupted himself to snatch off his silk handkerchief and throw it aside) it is not my fault. I should be only too happy to be allowed to come home earlier to my little Colette, my darling wife whom I——.”

He endeavours, on saying these words, to draw the tempting snow-white dressing-gown nearer to him, but he is harshly repulsed.

“Ah! I am not thinking of you, my poor fellow! I know you well enough, dear old simpleton quite incapable of committing the least—indeed, I should like to see it otherwise—but it is the king. Fancy, what a scandal, such a life, in his position! If even he were free, a bachelor. We all know young men must enjoy themselves, though in his case, his high rank and the dignity of exile.” (Oh! how little Colette draws herself up on the high heels of her slippers to speak of the dignity of exile.) “But he is married, and I can’t understand the queen. What in the world can she have in her veins?”

“Colette.”

“Oh, yes! I know, you are like your father. The queen cannot do wrong! As for me, I think that she is as much to blame as he is; by her coldness, her indifference, she has driven him away from her.”

“The queen is not indifferent. She is proud.”

“Come, come! are we proud when we love? If she really loved him, the very first night he had spent away from her would have been the last. She would have spoken, threatened, asserted herself. She could not have kept this cowardly silence under the torture she would have endured from the unfaithfulness of a man she loved. The con-

sequence is that the king spends all his nights at his club, in the low haunts of the boulevards, at the Prince d'Axel's, in company of Heaven knows whom ! ”

“ Colette, Colette ! ”

But there was no stopping Colette when she was once started off on the rapid flow of speech natural to every little bourgeoisie brought up in the exciting atmosphere of Paris, where the very dolls can talk.

“ That woman cares for nothing, I tell you, not even for her son. If she did, would she have confided him to that savage ? They exhaust him with study, poor little creature ! It seems that even at night he goes on repeating Latin and a lot of other trash in his sleep. The Marquise told me so. The queen does not miss a lesson. They are banded together against that poor child. And all, that he may be fit to reign ; but they will have killed him first. Oh ! that Méraut of yours ! I hate him ! ”

“ He is not such a bad fellow as all that. He might have been very disagreeable about that book, you know, and he never said a word. ”

“ Oh ! really ? Well, I can assure you the queen looks at you with a singular smile when you are congratulated upon it before her. But you are so simple, my poor Herbert ! ”

At the annoyed expression of her husband's face, who has flushed up, and pouts out his sulky lips like a child, the princess fears she has gone too far

and may miss her aim. But how can he withstand the charm of the pretty woman seated on his bedside, her head half turned towards him with a coquettish grace that shows off the youthful supple figure under its flowing laces, the soft roundness of the neck, the malicious glance of the eyes between their lashes !

The prince's honest face soon resumes its amiable expression, and even becomes singularly animated as the soft, warm hand approaches his own, and he breathes in the well-known perfume of the beloved one. What in the world is little Colette after ? What is it she wants to know ? Nothing much, only this : Has the king a mistress or has he not ? Is it the passion of gambling that carries him away, or only the love of pleasure, of wild-amusement ? The aide-de-camp hesitates before he answers. He feels it is a sort of disloyalty that he, the companion of all his adventures, should betray the king's secrets. But the little hand is so coaxing, so pressing, so full of curiosity, that the aide-de-camp of Christian II. can resist no longer.

“Well ! yes, the king has a mistress at present.”

Within his hand the little hand of Colette becomes cold and damp.

“And what is her name ?” she asks, breathing hard and short.

“Amy Férat, an actress of the Bouffes Theatre.”

Colette knows this Amy Férat ; she always thought her atrociously ugly.

“Oh!” says Herbert by way of excuse, “His Majesty will soon be tired of her.”

And Colette with evident satisfaction exclaims :

“Really!”

Upon which Herbert, enchanted with his success, ventures to play with a little knot of ribbon that flutters at her throat, and goes on in a light tone :

“Yes, I am afraid that before long poor Amy Férat will receive her marmoset.”

“A marmoset? Why?”

“Only something I have noticed. All who live in the king’s intimacy know as I do that when he begins to tire of a mistress he sends her one of his marmosets P.P.C.—a little way he has of saying good-bye to those he no longer cares for.”

“Oh! how shocking!” cries the indignant princess.

“Quite true, though! At the Grand Club they no longer say ‘drop a mistress,’ but ‘send her a marmoset.’”

He stops, surprised at seeing the princess abruptly rise up, take her lantern, and walk stiffly out of the alcove.

“I say, Colette! Colette!”

But she turns upon him with disdain and disgust. “I have heard quite enough of your horrid stories; they sicken me.”

And raising the door-curtain, she leaves the unfortunate king of *la Gomme* amazed and stupefied, with heart inflamed and arms outstretched.

wondering why she came at this unearthly hour, and why she leaves him in this most startling manner. With the rapid step of an actress leaving the stage, the floating train of her dressing-gown caught up and crumpled over her arm, Colette returns to her room at the other extremity of the house. On the couch, lying on a cushion covered with oriental embroidery, sleeps the prettiest little animal in the world, its silky grey coat more like feathers than hair, its long tail wound around it, and a little silver bell tied with a pink ribbon round its throat. It is an exquisite little marmoset the king had sent her some days ago, in a basket of Leghorn straw, and which she had received with pleasure and gratitude. Ah! if she had only known the meaning of the present! Furiously she snatches up the little creature, a bundle of living and scratching silk in which shine out, now that it is so suddenly awakened, two human-looking eyes, and, opening the window on the quay, with a ferocious gesture, she flings it out.

“There, dirty beast!”



The little monkey falls headlong on the wharf, and not only does he disappear and perish that night, but also perishes the dream, frail and capricious as himself, of the poor little creature who throws herself upon her bed, and sobs bitterly with her face hidden in the pillows.

Their love had lasted a year, an eternity in the eyes of the incurably fickle and childish king. He had only had to make a sign. Fascinated and dazzled, Colette de Rosen had fallen into his arms, though, until then, her conduct had been irreproachable, not because she loved her husband or cared for virtue, but simply because, in this little linnet's brain, there lingered a certain concern for the neatness of its plumage, which had preserved her from the grosser faults ; and also, because she was a Frenchwoman, of a race of women which Molière had declared long before the advent of our modern physiologists, to be devoid of temperament and open only to the temptations of their imagination and vanity.

It was not to Christian that the little Sauvadon had given herself, but to the King of Illyria. She had sacrificed herself to an ideal diadem conjured up from the romantic legends of her childhood's readings, and which she fondly believed she saw surrounding like a halo, the person of her selfish and sensual lover. She pleased him as long as he saw in her a new and brightly coloured plaything, a Parisian toy which was to lead him on to more

exciting pleasures. But she had the bad taste to take her rôle as "mistress of the King" in earnest. The figures of the women who, though mere imitation, had shone more brilliantly in history than the real gems of the crown, glittered before her eyes in her ambitious dreams. She would not consent to be a Dubarry; she would fain be the Duchesse de Châteauroux of this stranded Louis XV.; and his restoration to the throne of Illyria, the conspiracies she would direct with a wave of her fan, the sudden strokes, the heroic landings on inhospitable shores, were the subjects of all her conversations with the King. She fancied herself stirring up the country, hiding in the corn-fields and farm-houses, like one of the famous women of the Vendean war, whose adventures she had read about in the convent of the Sacred Heart. She had even contrived in imagination a page's costume for herself (dress always played the principal part in her inventions), a sweet little Renaissance costume which should permit of her holding interviews at all hours, and constantly accompanying the King. Christian disliked these enthusiastic reveries, for he quickly saw their false and silly sentimentality. He had not taken a mistress to hear her talk politics; and when he held his little soft kitten, his pretty Colette on his knees in all the graceful unreserve of her love, to be told about the recent resolutions of the Diet of Leybach or the effect of the latest royal proclamation, cast upon his heart just such a

chill as a sudden change of temperature, an April frost, casts upon the trees of a blossoming orchard.

Tardy scruples and remorse, the intricate remorse of a Slave and a Catholic, then began to assail him. Now that his caprice was satisfied, his conscience upbraided him with the odium of this intrigue carried on under the very eyes of the Queen ; he saw the danger of the stealthy, brief rendezvous in hotels, where their incognito might so easily be betrayed ; the cruelty of deceiving that poor good creature, Herbert, who always spoke of his wife with insatiable tenderness, and little thought, when the King joined him at the club with the beaming complexion and bright eyes of a successful lover, that he had just left the arms of Colette. But a still greater embarrassment was the Duc de Rosen, terribly suspicious of his young daughter-in-law, whose principles he mistrusted because she was not of his caste. He was uneasy for his son ; he fancied he had all the air of a — ; he would say the word right out like an old trooper that he was, and he could not but feel a certain responsibility in the matter, for it was through his greed of money that this *mésalliance* had been made. He kept a watchful eye over Colette, accompanied her morning and evening, and would indeed have followed her everywhere if the supple creature had not slipped between his big clumsy fingers. It was a silent strife between these two.

From the windows of the steward's house, the duke, seated at his writing-table, could see, not without vexation, his pretty daughter-in-law ensconced in her carriage, exquisitely dressed in the beautiful costumes that she combined in such consummate taste with her fashionable tailor; in the cold weather, pink and white in the warm shelter of her brougham; or on bright days, shaded by her fringed parasol.

"You are going out?" he would enquire.

"On the queen's service," the little Sauvadon would triumphantly answer from behind her veil; and it was true. Frédérique did not care for the noise of Paris, and readily confided her commissions to her lady-in-waiting; she had no pleasure in the vainglorious satisfaction of giving her name and title of queen in the fashionable shops, in the midst of the low-bowing clerks and the inquisitorial curiosity of the women. She was not popular in society. The colour of her hair and eyes, the somewhat stiff majesty of her figure, the ease with which she wore Parisian fashions, were not the subject of drawing-room discussion.

One morning the duke remarked in Colette such an expression of seriousness as she started from Saint-Mandé, such an air of over-excitement in all her little person, that instinctively—real sportsmen have these sudden inspirations—he determined to follow her. He gave chase for a long time, as far as a restaurant on the Quai d'Orsay. By dint of the

greatest ruse and skill the princess had managed to elude the ceremonious repast at the queen's table, and was about to breakfast with her lover in a private room. They eat, seated before a low window which opened on a lovely view, the Seine golden in the sunlight; the Tuileries forming a mass of stones and trees, and near at hand the interlaced masts and cordage of the training-ship lying in the green shadow of the quay. The weather, well suited to a rendezvous, had the softness of a warm day, crossed every now and again by sharp fresh breezes. Never did Colette laugh more merrily; her laugh was the triumph of her grace, and Christian, who adored her as long as she consented to remain the joyous creature he loved in her, was thoroughly enjoying his breakfast in the society of his mistress. All of a sudden, Colette caught sight of her father-in-law walking up and down with measured step on the opposite pavement, determined, to all appearance, not to leave his post. The old man was mounting a regular guard before the door, which he knew to be the only exit from the restaurant, and kept a watch over the well-got-up officers from the neighbouring cavalry barracks, as they entered one by one; for he imagined, being an old general of Pandours, that the uniform was irresistible, and he had not a doubt that spurs and sabretache were the moving spirit of his daughter-in-law's intrigue.

The perplexity of both Colette and the king was

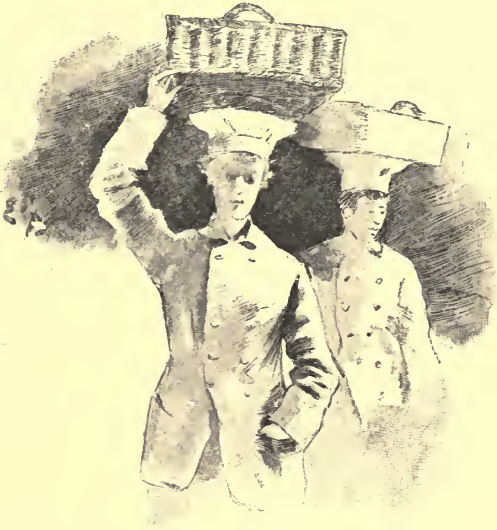
great; very much like that of the learned man perched up on a palm-tree, with a gaping crocodile at his feet. They were, however, sure enough of the discretion and incorruptibility of the restaurant people to be certain that the crocodile would not be allowed to come up. But how were they to get down? For the king it might yet be managed, for



he had plenty of time, and must surely succeed in wearing out the patience of the animal. But Colette! the queen would soon be expecting her, and might join her suspicions to those of old Rosen. The master of the establishment who, at the request of Christian, had come up and had been informed of the state of affairs, after having ransacked his brain, found nothing better than to suggest piercing the wall of the neighbouring house—as in times of revolution. However, he suddenly struck upon

a plan which was far more simple. The princess must disguise herself as a pastry-cook's boy, and carry out on her head her own dress and petticoats in a flat wicker-basket; she could in this guise leave the restaurant, take refuge in the barmaid's room, in a neighbouring street, and there resume her own clothes. At first Colette would not hear of such a thing. What! appear as a scullion before the king! She must perforce consent, under penalty of causing the most dreadful catastrophe; so she donned the freshly washed suit of a little lad some fourteen years of age, and the Princesse de Rosen, née Sauvadon, was transformed into the prettiest, the most coquettish little pastry-cook's boy that ever ran the streets of Paris at the hours when gourmands eat. But how far removed was this white linen cap, these boy's slippers, too large for her tiny feet, this jacket with its pockets full of jingling "tips," from the heroic page's costume, the pearl-hilted dagger, and the knee-boots in which she had longed to follow her Lara! Without a suspicion the duke saw two little boys pass out, their baskets on their heads exhaling such a pleasing odour of hot pastry, that he suddenly felt the first pangs of hunger—he was fasting, poor man! Upstairs the king, still a prisoner, but relieved of his anxiety, read the paper, drank his Roederer, peeping out every now and then through an uplifted corner of the curtain to ascertain whether the crocodile was still outside.

That evening, when he returned to Saint-Mandé, the duke was received by the princess with the most artless of smiles. He understood that he had been outwitted and never breathed a word of his



adventure. It got about nevertheless. Who knows through what drawing-room keyhole, over what half-lowered brougham window, by what echo repeated and sent back from deaf walls to mute doors, a scandalous rumour will spread through all Paris, until it blazes forth in broad daylight, that is in the publicity of society papers ; and from

there is poured into thousands of ears and becomes a public disgrace, after having been only the subject of an amusing anecdote at a club. For a week Paris made merry over the story of the little pastry-cook's boy. The names, whispered low, as low as such great names could be, did not penetrate into the thick skull of Prince Herbert. But the queen had some suspicion of the adventure; for she, who since their terrible scene at Leybach had never made a reproach of any kind to the king, drew him aside shortly after this incident one day, as they were leaving the dinner-table;

"I hear much," she said gravely, without looking at him, "about a scandalous story in which your name is mixed. Oh! pray do not excuse yourself. I do not want to know more, only I beg of you to have some regard for the crown confided to your care (she pointed to the diadem in the veiled radiance of its crystal casket). Do not allow shame or ridicule to attain it. It must remain worthy of your son."

Did she really know the story? Did she guess the name of the woman whom public slander had only half revealed? Frédérique's nature was so strong, her self-possession so great, that not one of her immediate circle could have answered the question. Christian, however, took the warning to heart, and his horror of scenes, the need his weak nature had of pleasant faces around him, smiling back to his own careless merriment,

decided him to draw from its cage the prettiest, the tamest of his marmosets, and send it to Princess Colette. She wrote, but he never answered ; he took no notice of her sighs or her doleful attitudes, but continued to address her in the tone of polite playfulness which attracted women to him ; and no longer burdened by the remorse which he had felt growing heavier as his passion decreased, set free from the tyranny of an affection far more exacting than his wife's, he threw himself headlong into the pursuit of pleasure, thinking of nothing but what "swells" call in their loose and flabby slang : *faire la fête*, or, go it ! It was the fashionable expression that year at the clubs ; there is no doubt another now.

The words change, but the thing remains, immutable and monotonous ; the great restaurants where it is carried on ; the gilt, flower-decked rooms where the fashionable courtesans invite and receive each other ; the enervating triviality of their pleasure sinking invariably into orgy, without the power of renewal. What never changes is the traditional, classical stupidity of this assembly of frail women and pleasure-worn men ; the stereotyped form of their slang and laugh ; the absence of all imagination or fancy in their commonplace, conventional society, quite as conventional as the other under its would-be appearance of mirth and folly ;—it is regulated disorder, a programme of caprices to be followed

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out with yawning ennui by its broken-down victims.

The king, at least, went about amusing himself with all the ardour of a youth of twenty. He yielded to that craving for excitement and freedom which had carried him on the very first evening of his arrival to Mabile; he sought to satisfy the desires, sharpened long beforehand by the accounts he had read in certain Parisian newspapers, which give day by day the appetizing bill of fare of a life of gallantry, and by the plays and novels which relate and idealize such scenes for the delectation of the provinces and foreign countries. His intrigue with the Princesse de Rosen had arrested him for a while on his descent to this gross debauch, a descent resembling that of the narrow staircases of the night restaurants, flooded with light, and softly carpeted on the upper steps, down which come, step by step, the partially drunk, increasing their pace as the lights diminish and the sharp night air meets them, till at last the steep stairway seems to lead straight to the gutter, in those dark hours sacred to the burglar and the vagabond. Christian now abandoned himself to the rapid descent, to the inevitable end; and, in his fall, it was not so much the excitement of the heady Spanish wines that intoxicated him, as the little court, the clan of courtiers which surrounded him; ruined noblemen in search of royal dupes, Bohemian journalists, whose paid articles amused



him, and who, proud of their intimacy with the illustrious exile, took him behind the scenes of the theatres, where the women, blushing affectedly under the rouge that covered their enamelled cheeks, had eyes but for him. He had soon become familiar with the boulevard slang, its exaggerations and silly affectations; he could say like a perfect *gommeux*: "*Chic, très chic.*



*C'est infect, on se tord;*"\* but, in his mouth, spoken with his foreign accent, these expressions lost somewhat of their vulgarity, and gave them a flavour of Bohemianism. There was one word he particularly delighted in: "*rigolo.*"† He used it at every turn: theatrical plays, novels, public events or private adventures, were or were not "*rigolo.*" It exempted Monseigneur from all mental exertion. On one occasion, towards the end of a midnight

\* Tip-top—All rot—Splitting fun.

† Equivalent to "awfully funny."

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supper, Amy Férat, who was drunk, and irritated by the constantly repeated word, cried out :

“Hi ! I say, *Rigolo !*”

This familiarity pleased him. Here was one, at least, who did not treat him as a king. He made her his mistress, and long after his connection with the actress in vogue was over, the nickname remained to him, as that of “*Queue-de-Poule,*” given to the Prince d’Axel no one knows why, remained in the same way attached to him.

Rigolo and Queue-de-Poule became fast friends. They were always together, hunting the same quarry, mingling in various boudoirs their similar destinies ; for the disgrace of the hereditary prince was equivalent to an exile. He spent it as agreeably as he could, and for the last ten years he had been playing his freaks in all the night-haunts of the boulevards, wearing always the same dismal face in the midst of the wildest pranks. The King of Illyria had his apartment in Prince d’Axel’s mansion in the Champs Elysées. At first he would sleep there only on rare occasions, but he soon took to spending the night there as often as at Saint-Mandé. These absences, explained with a certain speciousness, left the queen quite calm, but they threw the princess into the greatest despondency. In her mortification at her desertion by the king, she had consoled herself with the hope of regaining his inconstant heart. She used all her skill to do so, a thousand coquettish

inventions, new adornments, wonderful combinations of colours and shapes, which should bring out more strikingly than ever the peculiar grace of her beauty. And what bitter disappointment when, at seven o'clock in the evening, the king not having appeared, Frédérique, in her imperturbable serenity, would have little Zara's chair put in the place of honour, saying: "His Majesty will not dine here to-night."

Poor nervous Colette, obliged to hide her vexation in silence, longed for an outburst from the Queen which should revenge them both; but Frédérique, hardly paler than usual, retained her sovereign composure, though the princess, with true feminine cruelty and consummate art, tried to insinuate ghastly revelations: as to the life in the clubs of Paris, the coarse conversations of men between themselves, and the still coarser amusements to which their idleness and constant absence from home allured them; the terrible gambling which left whole fortunes on the card-tables; the eccentric bets entered in a special register which it would be curious to peruse, true "golden record" of human aberration. But do what she might, she could not succeed in disturbing the queen by her incessant pricks; the queen did not, or rather would not, understand.

Only once did she betray herself; it was one morning during a ride through the woods of Saint-Mandé.

It was a sharp cold day in March ; the wind catching the surface of the lake, ruffled it back towards the hard and still flowerless banks. A few buds only were beginning to show on the tips of the leafless shrubs which still bore the red berries of the winter ; the horses, side by side, followed a pathway strewn with dead branches which cracked



under their feet, and the noise they made, together with the creaking of new leather and rattling of their curb-chains, were the only sounds that disturbed the silence of the woods. The two women, both equally good riders, rode slowly on, absorbed in the stillness of this intermediate season, which prepares for the renewal of spring, in the heavens still heavy with rain, and on the earth still black with the winter's snow. Colette, however, soon began on her favourite subject, as she did almost

always when alone with the Queen. She did not dare to attack the king openly, but she fell upon his surroundings, the men of the Grand Club, almost all of whom she knew through Herbert, or through Parisian gossip, and whom she showed up in masterly style, the Prince d'Axel first and foremost.

Really she could not understand that anyone could be intimate with such a man ; a man who spent his life in gambling and feasting, who had no pleasure but in low company ; sitting out in the evening with bad women on the boulevards, drinking like a cabman with the first-comer, hail-fellow-well-met with the lowest sort of play-actors. And to think that such a fellow was an hereditary prince ! He seemed to take pleasure in degrading, sullyng royalty in his own person.

And she talked on and on with towering indignation and anger, while the queen, intentionally absent-minded, looking vacantly ahead, stroked the neck of her horse, hurrying his pace so as to get away from her lady-in-waiting's stories. But Colette pressed her horse on too.

“ He has, moreover, a good example to follow. His uncle's conduct is as bad as his own. A man who flaunts his mistresses with such impudence before his court, before his wife. What a rôle of sacrificed slave for a queen to play ! What kind of nature can she have to put up with such insults ! ”

This time the thrust had gone home. Cut to the heart, Frédérique lowered her eyelids, and, for

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a moment, there appeared upon her features, suddenly hollowed and aged, such a worn and painful expression that Colette could not help being moved on seeing the haughty queen whose heart she had never been able to reach, descend to the level of feminine suffering. But the moment was soon past ; she quickly regained possession of her dignity :

“The woman you speak of is a queen,” she said sharply, “and you would be committing a great injustice to judge her like other women. Other women can be openly happy or unhappy, shed all their tears, and even cry out if their pain is too great. But queens !—alas they must hide everything : their sorrows as wife, their sorrows as mother ; they must hide and devour them in silence. Can a queen run away when she is outraged ? Can she sue for a separation, rejoicing thereby the hearts of the enemies of her throne ? No, at the risk of appearing cruel, blind and indifferent, she must preserve a lofty brow to uphold her crown. And it is not pride, but the feeling of our dignity that sustains us. It is this feeling that enables us to drive out in an open carriage between husband and child, under the threatening fire of imminent conspiracies, that alleviates the dreariness of the land of exile and its murky skies, that gives us the strength to bear certain cruel affronts of which you ought to be the last to remind me, Princesse de Rosen.”

She grew excited as she spoke, and the words came hurried towards the end ; then she suddenly roused her horse with a vigorous shake of the bridle and dashed off at full gallop through the woods, her blue veil streaming behind her, and the heavy folds of her riding habit flapping in the wind.

From this time forward Colette left the queen in peace ; but, as her unquiet nerves needed some distraction and relief, she directed her stings and anger against Elysée, and regularly took up the side of the marquise. The royal household was divided into two camps : Elysée had only Father Alphée on his side, and certainly the monk's rugged frankness and ever-ready answer were of immense help in times of need ; but he was often absent on frequent missions to Illyria, where he had to manage the affairs of the Franciscan monasteries of Zara and Ragusa, and their arrangements with the mother-house of the rue des Fourneaux.

This, at least, was the pretext of his temporary absences, which he surrounded with the utmost mystery, and from which he always returned more ardent, mounting the stairs with a more furious tramp, rolling his rosary in his fingers, and muttering a prayer, which he seemed to munch like a musket-ball.

He would remain for hours shut up with the queen, then start off again, leaving the coterie of the marquise free to work against the preceptor.

From the old duke, whose military and worldly instincts were offended by Méraut's shaggy hair and untidy appearance, down to Lebeau, the valet, and the humblest of the grooms and scullions,—in whom all independence creates enemies,—even to the inoffensive Boscovich who, like a coward, followed the others out of respect for numbers, all followed suit, and formed a veritable coalition against the new tutor. This showed itself not so much by overt acts as by words, looks, and attitudes in the little daily skirmishes so common among people who live in the same house while detesting each other. Oh! the indescribable attitudes of Madame de Silvis! In turn disdainful, haughty, ironical, or bitter, she played her part with Elysée, while, at the same time, she assumed an expression of respectful pity, with smothered sighs and eyes rolled up to the ceiling, whenever she found herself with the little prince: "Are you not suffering, Monseigneur?" And she would feel his forehead with her long bony fingers, unmaning him with her tremulous caresses. Then the queen in a cheerful tone would reply:

"Come, come, marquise, you will persuade Zara that he is ill."

"I find his hands and forehead rather hot."

"He has just come in from walking. It is the cold air."

And she would take the child away, though slightly disturbed herself at the remarks she so



constantly heard repeated around her, and which had created a sort of legend in the house, that Monseigneur was made to study too much. The Parisian portion of the household said so, without believing or attaching any importance to the statement ; but not so the servants brought over from Illyria, the tall Petscha, the faithful old Greb ; they took the affair in earnest, and cast upon M é r a u t black looks of hatred, harassing him with their tormenting antipathy in the thousand little pin-pricks which their service put it in their power to inflict upon an absent-minded dependent. He again underwent the petty persecutions and jealousies of the palace at X., the same grovelling subservience that creeps around a throne, and which it appears even overthrow and exile have not the power to remove. His generous and affectionate nature recoiled from the antipathy and resistance which surrounded him ; his simple, homely manners, the Bohemian habits of his artist's life were oppressed by the forced ceremonial of the king's household, the imposing candelabras of the brilliantly-lighted dinner-table, where the men in their dress-coats, and the women with bare necks, seated far apart with due formality, never spoke or ate before the king and queen had spoken and eaten ; ruled above all by the inexorable etiquette which the Duc de Rosen imposed with more and more rigour as the term of exile extended day by day into the dim future. It would happen occa-

sionally that the old student of the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince would come to the table with a coloured cravat on, and, forgetting all rules, would speak without permission, pitching head foremost into one of the eloquent improvisations so often echoed by the walls of the Café Voltaire. But soon called to order by the withering glances thrown at him, the repugnance he felt for the importance attached to the smallest infraction of these petty customs became such, that he longed to throw the whole thing over, and return once more, as he had done before, to his old quarters in the Quartier Latin.

However, his attachment to the queen retained him. As he had become more intimate with Frédérique through her child, he had conceived for her a fanatical infatuation, made up of respect, of admiration, and a sort of superstitious faith. For him, she summed up and symbolised in herself the ideal of his monarchical creed, just as, for the Transteverian peasant, the Madonna represents all religion. It was for her he remained and endeavoured to carry his hard task to a successful end. But it was indeed a tax upon his patience. How difficult to get the least thing into the little head of this king's child! He was a charming little fellow, poor Zara, gentle and good; his will was not wanting; the serious, straightforward soul of his mother was in him, but mingled with a sort of childishness, of fleeting instability in his ideas

which his age hardly accounted for. The mind was evidently undeveloped in this poor, little, old-fashioned, stunted body, never tempted by play, but weighed down by a constant state of dreaminess, which often went as far as torpor. Lulled by the fantastic tales of his governess during his first years, which had been only a long convalescence, the new life, now imperfectly appearing before his eyes, seemed to strike him only by its analogy with his fairy-tales, where the fairies and magicians were confounded with kings and queens, rescued them from enchanted towers and oubliettes, delivered them by a stroke of their golden wands from snares and persecutions, scattering the dragons who spat fire, and the old witches who changed their victims into beasts, and destroying the terrific ramparts of thorns and walls of ice. At his lesson, in the midst of a difficult explanation, he would say: "That is like the story of the little tailor;" or if he was reading the description of a great battle: "The giant Robistor killed many more than that." It was this tendency of his mind towards the wonderful which gave him his absent-minded air, and which kept him for hours motionless on the cushions of a sofa, his eyes fixed upon the ever-changing and fleeting phantasmagoria conjured up before them, and dazzled by the blinding light of the fairy scenes in some *Rothomago*, as they unfolded their wondrous prismatic pictures one after the other in his memory. And this was why he

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found it difficult to reason or apply himself to the serious studies which were expected of him.

The queen assisted at all the lessons, her embroidery which never made any progress in her hand, and in her beautiful eyes the look of deep attention so flattering to the master, who felt her vibrate to all his thoughts, even to those he did not express. This was the bond that united them, unity of dreams, of hopes, the chimeras that float above our convictions and extend them to others. She had adopted him as her counsellor, her confidant, affecting to speak always in the name of the king.

“Monsieur Méraut,” she would say, “His Majesty would be glad to have your opinion on such and such a subject.”

And great was the surprise of Elysée on finding that the king himself never conversed with him upon these subjects that were supposed to interest him so deeply.

Christian II. treated him with consideration, addressing him in a tone of familiar companionship, most kindly but of a superficial sort. At times, as he passed through the schoolroom, he would pause for a moment to assist at the lesson, and then, laying his hand on the young prince's shoulder :

“Do not press him too much,” he would say, in an undertone, which was only an echo of what was thought by all the subordinates of the household.

“ You surely don't intend to make a scientific man of him ? ”

“ I wish to make him a king,” Frédérique would proudly answer.

And on seeing her husband's gesture of discouragement :

“ Is he not to reign some day ? ”

“ Oh ! certainly, certainly.”

And, making a low bow, closing the door behind him to avoid further discussion, he would be heard humming, as he went away, the air of an operetta then in fashion : “ *Il règnera, il règnera, car il est Espagnol.* ”* Altogether Elysée could make nothing of this king, to all appearance so affable, so superficial, so capricious ; this perfumed dandy who spent hours lounging, in the weariness of his unstrung nerves, upon the divans of his drawing-room ; the man whom he had been led to believe was the hero of Ragusa, the king whose energetic firmness and bravery were described in his *Memorial*. However, notwithstanding Frédérique's skill in disguising the shallowness and emptiness of this crowned head, and the care she took to keep her own personality concealed behind that of the king's, unforeseen events would crop up and reveal the natures of each in their proper light.

One morning after breakfast, just as they entered the drawing-room, Frédérique, on opening

* From *la Périchole* : “ He will reign—he will reign—for he is a Spaniard.”

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the paper, the *Courrier d'Illyrie*, which she was always the first to read, gave vent to such a loud exclamation of grief, that the king, who was ready to go out, stopped short, and all the persons present grouped themselves in one moment around the queen. Frédérique handed the paper to Boscovich :

“ Read,” she said.

It was the account of a sitting of the Diet of Leybach, and a resolution that had been passed by the Republican Government to return to the dispossessed sovereigns all the domains of the Crown, more than eight millions sterling, on the express condition—

“ Bravo !” said Christian, with his nasal voice, “ that suits me down to the ground.”

“ Read on,” said the queen severely.

“ On the express condition that Christian II. should give up for himself and his heirs all rights to the crown of Illyria.”

A burst of indignation followed from all sides. Old Rosen was suffocating, the cheeks of Père Alphée grew deadly white, and his black eyes and beard looked blacker in contrast with the grey pallor that spread over his countenance.

“ This must be answered at once,” said the queen ; “ we cannot for a moment stand such an insult,” and in her indignation her eyes sought for Méraut, who had been occupied for some minutes writing feverishly at a corner of the table with his pencil.

“This is what I should write,” he said as he came forward ; and he read, under the form of a letter to a royalist deputy, a spirited proclamation to the people of Illyria, in which the king, scornfully rejecting the insulting proposition made to him, reassured and encouraged his partisans with the impressive accent of a father kept aloof from his children.

The queen, enraptured, clapped her hands, seized the paper, and, handing it to Boscovich, said :

“Quick, translate it and send it off at once. Is not that your opinion ?” she added, remembering all at once that Christian was present, and that they were observed.

“No doubt, yes,” said the king, nervously biting his nails in his perplexity. “All that is very fine, only this is the question : shall we be able to stick to it ?”

She turned upon him, very pale, as though she had received a blow between her shoulders.

“Stick to it ! You ask whether we shall be able to stick to it. Is it the king who speaks ?”

He answered very calmly :

“When Ragusa was without bread, at last, with the best will in the world, we were, nevertheless forced to surrender.”

“Yes ; but this time, when we are without bread, we will lay the beggar’s sack on our shoulders and beg from door to door ; but royalty shall not surrender.”

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What a scene in that small drawing-room of a suburb of Paris ! This contest between two fallen sovereigns, the one so evidently weary of the struggle, broken down by the want of faith in his own destiny, the other burning with ardour and confidence ! How strikingly did their two natures reveal themselves ! Yielding versatility written in every line of the king's person, in his very dress, his loose morning suit, his low shirt-collar showing his bare neck ; in the effeminacy of his drooping white hands, and the slightly moistened curls on his pale forehead. The queen, slender and superb in her close-fitting riding habit, with its broad lapels, its little straight collar, the plain cuffs that edged with white the sombre mourning of the costume, and set off the splendour of her brilliant complexion, her flashing eyes and auburn tresses. For the first time Elysée had a rapid and true vision of the real state of things between this royal pair.

All at once Christian II. turned to the Duc de Rosen, who was standing against the mantelpiece, his head bent down :

“ Rosen ! ” he said.

“ Sire ? ”

“ You alone can tell us that. How do our money matters stand ? Can we hold out ? ”

The comptroller of the household, with a haughty gesture, answered :

“ Certainly.”

“How long, do you know? About how long do you suppose?”

“Five years; I have made the calculation.”

“Without privations for any one? without any of those we love suffering in any way?”

“Exactly so, sire.”

“Are you quite certain?”

“Yes, certain,” affirmed the old man, straightening himself up to his full height.

“Well then, all right. M é r a u t, give me your letter; let me sign it before I go out.” And in an undertone he added, as he took the pen from his hand:

“Just look at Madame de Silvis; does she not look as if she were going to sing ‘*Sombre forêt?*’”

And indeed the marquise, just then returning from the garden with the little prince, infected by the dramatic atmosphere of the drawing-room, stood in her green-plumed cap and velvet spencer, with her head thrown back and her hand upon her heart, somewhat in the transported and romantic attitude of an opera-singer about to begin the cavatina of the evening.

The protestation of the king was not only read in Parliament and published in all the papers, but it was also by Elysée’s advice autographed and sent in thousands of copies into the country, smuggled through the custom-house by Father Alphée, who concealed them, together with his olive-wood chaplets and roses of Jericho, under the general

name of "articles of piety." The effect was excellent. The royalist party was not only strengthened but augmented. Dalmatia, more particularly where republican ideas had hardly penetrated, was stirred on hearing the eloquent voice of her king delivered in village pulpits by the mendicant friars of the Order of St. Francis who, at the village doors, opened their wallets and paid for the presents of eggs and butter with little bundles of printed papers. Addresses to the king were soon covered with signatures, and those little crosses of the uneducated peasants so touching in their ignorant affection.

Numerous pilgrimages were organized. A stream of deputations flowed into the little house at Saint-Mandé. Groups of fishermen, street porters from Ragusa wearing black cloaks thrown over their bright oriental costumes, half savage Morlachian peasants with their sheep-skin *opankés* tied on to their feet with straps of straw. They descended in troops from the tramways, where their scarlet tunics, their fringed scarves, and the metal buttons of their waistcoats jarred strangely with the grey uniformity of Parisian garb; they crossed the courtyard with firm steps, but faltered as they entered the hall, consulting together in whispers in their shyness and emotion. Méraut, who assisted at their presentation to the king, was moved to the heart; the legend of his childhood rose up again before him as he witnessed the

enthusiasm of these pilgrims from afar ; it recalled to him the visits to Frohsdorf of the villagers of the *Enclos de Rey*, the privations they imposed upon themselves, the preparations for the journey, the concealed disappointment they brought back ; and he bitterly felt the sullen indifference of Christian and the too-evident sighs of relief to which he gave vent at the close of each interview. The king, in truth, hated these visits, which disturbed his everyday habits and pleasures, and obliged him to spend long afternoons at Saint-Mandé. Out of consideration for the queen, however, he received the tearful protestations of all these faithful creatures with a few commonplace words, and then avenged himself for his trouble by some poor joke or other—a caricature pencilled on a bit of paper, with that spirit of malicious mockery which lurked in the corners of his mouth. He once made the caricature of the syndic of the Branizza fishermen, a broad Italian face with flabby cheeks and round staring eyes from which the tears rained down to his chin in the joy and emotion of his interview with the king. The next day this production was circulated round the table amidst the laughter and admiring exclamations of the guests. The Duke himself, in his contempt for the lower classes, puckered up his old face in unrestrained hilarity, and the drawing at last reached Elysée after having passed under the delighted approval of Boscovich. Elysée looked at it in silence, and handed it without a word to his

neighbour ; and when the king called out to him in his impertinent drawling tone :

“ Why don't you laugh, Méraut ? Is not my charming syndic to your taste ? ”

He answered sadly :

“ Monseigneur, I cannot laugh. It is the exact portrait of my father.”

Shortly after Elysée involuntarily witnessed a scene which enlightened him completely as to the relations of Christian with the queen. It was on a Sunday, after mass. The little house, with an air of unusual festivity, had opened wide its gates upon the rue Herbillon ; all the servants stood in a double row in the hall which had been filled with flowers. The reception of that day was to be one of extraordinary importance. A royalist deputation of the members of the Diet of Leybach was expected, the *élite* of the party come to pay homage of fidelity and devotion to the king, and consult with him as to the measures to be taken for his restoration to the throne. It was a long-expected event, and the brilliancy of a glorious winter sun lit up the solitude of the great reception-room, where the high arm-chair of the king was prepared as a throne ; and threw its radiance upon the sparkling gems, the rubies, sapphires, and topazes of the crown.

The whole house was in a state of agitation with ceaseless comings and goings, and the rustle of silk dresses on the stairs ; the little prince was repeat-

ing the speech that had been taught him for the last week, while his long red stockings, velvet suit, and collar of Venetian point were being put on ; Rosen, in full uniform and all his decorations, stood drawn up taller than ever, ready to receive the deputies ; while Elysée, keeping away from all this stir, alone in the school-room, mused over the possible consequences of the approaching interview, and in the vivid mirage created by his excitable Southern brain, conceived and beheld the triumphal return of his princes to Leybach ; he saw, amid the roar of cannon, the peal of bells, the streets strewn with flowers, the king and queen holding before them like a promise to their people his beloved pupil, little Zara, the grave and intelligent child whose very gravity told of emotions too violent for his age. And the splendour of this bright Sunday, the cheerful sound of the bells clanging in the brilliant midday sun, were for him enhanced by the hope that in the coming triumph the maternal joy of Frédérique might stray over the head of her child down to him, and beam upon him in a smile of proud satisfaction.

Meanwhile, the chief courtyard resounded with the heavy wheels of the gala carriages which had been sent to fetch the deputies at their various houses, and the loud bell at the gate announced the arrivals one after the other. The carriage doors slammed, subdued sounds of steps as they fell on the carpets of the hall and drawing-room were

succeeded by murmurs of reverent voices. Then a long silence which surprised Méraut, who expected to hear the well-known nasal voice which should deliver the king's speech. What could have happened? why this hesitation in the appointed order of the ceremony?



At this moment he perceived the man he supposed to be in the next room presiding over the official reception, skirting the walls, the blackened espaliers of the cold though sun-lit garden, and walking along with a stiff, uncertain gait. He had

evidently entered by the private door hidden in the ivy of the Avenue Daumesnil, and he was approaching the house slowly and laboriously. Elysée at once imagined there had been some duel or accident, and presently he heard a heavy fall in the room above, which confirmed him in the idea, for long and heavy was it, and accompanied with such a crash of fallen objects, that it sounded like that of a man who had sought to save himself by holding on to the hangings and furniture. He ran up to the king's room. It was a warmly-cushioned nest, situated in the principal wing of the house, hung in dark red, the walls covered with trophies of old weapons, and furnished with divans and low arm-chairs, lions' and bears' skins; and, in the midst of this oriental effeminacy, a camp-bed in which, according to a tradition in his family, the king slept—a piece of originality and affected simplicity common alike to princes and millionaires.

The door was wide open.

Christian stood leaning against the wall, pale and discomposed, with his hat on the back of his head, his long fur coat half opened, and showing underneath his tumbled dress-coat, his white cravat untied, his broad shirt-front creased and soiled, the crumpled linen telling only too plainly of the night's drunken debauch. Before him stood the queen, erect and severe, her stern voice trembling with the violent effort she made to keep calm :

“ You must—you must come.”

But he, in a low, sheepish voice, replied :

“ I can't ; don't you see I can't ; later, I promise you.”

And he stammered out excuses, with a silly laugh and childish deprecation. It was not that he had drunk. Oh, no ! it was only the air, the cold air as he came out after supper.

“ Yes,” said the queen, “ I know ; but nevertheless you must come down ; they must see you, only let them see you. I will do the rest. I know what to say to them.”

And as he remained motionless, and a heavy drowsiness began to steal over the ghastly relaxation of his features, Frédérique's anger increased.

“ Cannot you understand that your very destiny is in question, that your crown is at stake ? Christian, it is your crown, the crown of your son that you are playing with at this moment. Come—come—I beseech you. You must—you shall.”

In the force of her powerful will she was superb as she stood galvanizing the king into life, with the magnetism of her ocean-blue eyes. She picked him up with her mesmeric glance ; steadied him, helped him off with his hat, his pelisse reeking with the fumes of tobacco and drink. He stiffened out his tottering legs for a moment, made a few staggering steps forward, leaning his burning palms on the marble hands of the queen. But all at once she felt him give way, and, recoiling from his

feverish contact, she thrust him violently away with disgust, letting him fall at full length on a divan, and without a look at the crumpled, inert and already snoring mass, she left the room, walking rigidly with eyes half shut, and passed before Elysée without noticing him, murmuring in the disordered, mournful tone of a somnambulist :

*“Alla fine sono stanca de fare gesti de questo monarcaccio !”**

* “I am weary at last of pulling the strings of this puppet of a king.”





V.

J. TOM LEVIS' FOREIGN AGENCY.

OF all the Parisian dens, of all the thieves' caverns that sap and undermine the great city, there is not a more peculiar or more interesting organisation than that of Levis' Agency. It is known to all, at least from the outside. Situated in the rue Royale, at the corner of the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, in full view of the carriages passing

to and from the Bois, so that no one can avoid seeing the glaring advertisement of the sumptuous ground-floor reached by eight steps, with its tall plate-glass windows on which are emblazoned in red, blue, and gold, the escutcheons of the most important powers in Europe: eagles, unicorns, leopards—a complete heraldic menagerie. At a distance of thirty yards, across the whole street which is as wide as a boulevard, Levis' Agency attracts the attention of the least curious of passers-by. Each one asks himself: "What can they sell there?" It would be easier to say: "What do they not sell there?" On each window can be read in beautiful gold letters: "Wines, liquors, pale-ale, kummel, raki, caviare, preserved cod;" or else: "Ancient and modern furniture, tapestries, hangings, carpets from Smyrna and Ispahan." Further on: "Paintings by old masters, marbles, terra-cotta, arms and armour, medals, panoplies;" or again: "Money changed, discount, foreign money." Then: "Universal library, newspapers from every country and in every language, sale and lease of houses, shooting, fishing, sea-side residences;" or: "Private inquiries quickly and discreetly carried out."

The crowded inscriptions and brilliant escutcheons are so mingled that it is impossible to distinguish what is displayed behind the shop window. A vague glimpse is caught of strange and oddly coloured bottles, of carved-wood chairs, of pictures

and furs, and, in wooden platters a few half-opened rolls of piastres and bundles of bank-notes are to be seen. But the vast basement of the house, opening on to the pavement by low-grated cellar windows, forms a real solid basis to the garish display of the great flaunting shop, and conveyed the impression of some rich, solid, London warehouse, sustaining the *chic* and show of a shop-window of the boulevard de la Madeleine. In that basement were piles of rich products of all kinds: rows of barrels, bales of materials, heaps of chests, coffers, boxes of preserves, dizzy depths such as are seen on board a loading steamer through the open hatches.

Thus placed, firmly stretched in the very midst of the Parisian eddy, the net catches as they pass every kind of fish—large and small, even the merest fry, the very wariest of all; and at about three o'clock in the afternoon the shop is nearly always full.

At the glass door of the rue Royale, tall and light, surrounded by a wide pediment of carved wood, stands a hall porter, covered with gold braid, who turns the handle and holds up an umbrella, if need be, for the customers as they step out of their carriages. The front room is an immense hall divided by wooden barriers and grated wickets into a number of compartments, regular horse-boxes, right and left to the very end. The dazzling light is reflected on the polished floor, the wainscoting, the neat frock-coats and artificially-curled locks of

the clerks, all of them stylish, smart-looking men, but betraying in their accent and manner a foreign origin. Among them are olive complexions, pointed skulls, narrow Asiatic shoulders, light blue eyes and American "goatees," and high-coloured Germans. In whatever language the customer may give his order, he is always certain of being understood, for every language is spoken at this agency, except indeed Russian, which is not necessary, seeing that Russians themselves speak every language except their own. The crowd comes and goes round the wickets, or waits seated on light chairs; ladies and gentlemen in travelling costume, a medley of Astrakan caps, Scotch caps, long veils floating above waterproofs, dust cloaks, check tweeds indiscriminately covering both sexes, with strapped rugs and leathern bags slung across shoulders; in fact, the crowd of a railway station, gesticulating, talking loud, with the indifference and coolness of people in a strange land, producing by a ceaseless jabber in many languages the same confused motley of sound that is heard at a bird-fancier's. At the same time is heard the sound of drawn corks and the rattle of gold pieces on the counters. Then the ring of interminable electric bells, the whistles in the call-tubes, the rustling of some unfolded plans for a house, scales run on a new piano to try it, or the exclamations of a tribe of Samayedes round a gigantic photograph, completes the pandemonium.

From one compartment to another the clerks call out for information, a number, a name, or a street. Now smiling and eager, and again suddenly



cold and reserved, appearing completely indifferent to the things of this world, whenever an unfortunate and dismayed customer, sent from wicket to wicket, bends over to whisper into their ear some mysterious affair, which apparently fills them with

astonishment. Sometimes, impatient at being stared at as if he were a waterspout or an aërolite, the inquirer would ask to see J. Tom Levis himself, who will, he affirms, certainly understand the matter in question. Then with a lofty smile he is told that J. Tom Levis is engaged, that he is busy with some important client.

Not any paltry little business like yours, my dear sir! or such petty folk as you are! Look over

there, at the further end of the hall. A door has just opened,

and for one moment J. Tom Levis is visible.

More majestic than all his clerks put together, with his important round stomach and imposing smooth skull, as shiny as the polished

floor of his office, by the toss of his small head and his distant glance, by the despotic gesture of his short arm, and the solemn and loud voice in which he inquires, with an English accent, if "His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales's parcel has been dispatched," keeping at the same time the other hand on the door that he has hermetically closed



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behind him, as though to indicate that the august personage shut in there, is one who may not be disturbed on any pretext whatever.

Needless to add that the Prince of Wales has never been to this office, and that no parcel has ever been sent to him. But fancy the effect created on the crowd in the hall, and on the solitary customer to whom Tom has just said in his private room : "Excuse me for a moment ; I have something to ask about."

All is sham ! There is no more Prince of Wales behind the closed door than there is raki or kummel in the strange bottles in the window, nor English or Viennese beer in the casks underground. The emblazoned, gilded, varnished coaches, with J. T. L. on their panels, that pass at a gallop, all the more rapidly that they are empty, dashing along through the finest quarters of Paris, are but a noisy and perambulating advertisement, tearing over the pavement with the all-devouring activity that in Tom Levis' Agency characterises both man and beast. Should any poor devil, excited by all this gold, break the glass window and ravenously plunge his bleeding hand into the wooden platters, he would only clutch hold of a handful of counters ; if he seized an enormous bundle of bank-notes, he would find himself the possessor of a twenty-five pound note on the top of a quire of common paper. There is nothing in the shop-front, nothing in the basement, nothing, absolutely nothing ! How



then about the port wine the Englishmen are tasting? the French coin the boyard has had in exchange for his roubles? the bronze group carefully packed up for the Greek lady? Nothing is easier. The English beer comes from the tavern next door; the gold from a neighbouring money-changer on the boulevards; the bronze from "What's his name" in the rue du Quatre-Septembre. Two or three men waiting in the basement, the orders transmitted through the speaking-tubes, have only to dash off as quickly as their legs will carry them to fetch the required objects.

They go out through a neighbouring courtyard, return in a few minutes and emerge from the spiral staircase, ornamented by a richly-wrought banister and crystal globe that unites the two stories. Here is the article demanded; warranted and labelled J. T. L. If it does not suit his lordship it is of no consequence, it can be changed. The Agency cellars are well-stocked. Maybe it is a trifle dearer than anywhere else, only the double or treble; but is not that preferable to running from shop to shop, where not a word of a foreign language is understood, notwithstanding the alluring promise of "*English spoken*" or "*Man spricht deutsch?*" Better than those shops on the boulevards, where the unfortunate stranger, circumvented and deceived, finds only the dregs, remnants, and refuse of Paris fashions, the "last season's," more tarnished by the date of their make

even than by the dust and sun of the shop window. The obsequious, sneering, disdainful, and irrepresible Parisian shop-keeper's day is over, foreigners will have none of him. They are weary at last of being so ferociously defrauded, not only by the shop-keeper, but at the hotel where they sleep, at the restaurant where they dine, by the cab they pick up in the streets, by the theatrical agent who sends them to be bored at the empty theatres. At least at Levis' Agency, this ingenious agency for foreigners, everything wished for could be found, and that without being cheated; for was not J. T. Levis an Englishman, and is not English commercial honesty of wide-world fame?

Nobody could be more English than J. Tom Levis, from the tips of his square-toed Quaker shoes to his long frock-coat falling over his green plaid trousers, and his tall narrow-brimmed hat, which sets off his round, red, good-natured face so well. British honesty, fed on beefsteaks, can be read in that complexion, in that mouth, slit up from ear to ear, in the flaxen colour of the uneven whiskers, uneven from the habit their possessor has of nibbling one—always the same—whenever he is perplexed; and in the short hairy fingers covered with rings. How loyal also are those eyes, seen behind a great pair of spectacles, delicately mounted in gold. So loyal indeed that if perchance J. Tom Levis happens to tell a lie—the best men are exposed to such an eventuality—his eyeballs, by a

singular nervous tic, turn round rapidly like little wheels twisting and revolving in the vista of a gyroscope.

The finishing touch of Tom Levis' English physiognomy was his cab, the first vehicle of the



kind that was seen in Paris, and which seemed the natural shell of this queer being. If at any time he found himself, as often happens in business, hard pressed by some unforeseen complication, Tom would say: "Call the cab!" and he was certain to find some idea as he drove along. He weighed, commented, devised combinations, whilst the Parisians watched the transparent box roll by with the outline of the absorbed man energetically munching his right whisker. It was in this cab that he had conceived and elaborated his most

famous strokes of business towards the end of the second Empire. Ah! that was the good time! Paris was crowded with strangers, not mere birds of passage, but exotic fortunes settling down, only craving for pleasure and revelry. There was the Turk Hussein Bey and the Egyptian Mahomet Pasha, two celebrated Orientals, well-known in the Bois; there was the Princess Verkatscheff scattering all the silver of the Oural mountains from the windows of her first floor in the boulevard Malesherbes; and the American Bergson, whose enormous income, derived from his petroleum wells, Paris was then devouring. Since then Bergson has recovered his wealth. And then there were the nabobs, the swarm of nabobs, of all tints: yellow, brown, red, mottling the theatres and parks, eager to spend, to enjoy life, as though they foresaw that they would soon have to quit this great merry carousal before the formidable explosion that was about to burst through the roof and shatter the mirrors and window-panes.

J. Tom Levis was the indispensable middleman in all these pleasures; not a single napoleon was spent without his having first pored at it. To his foreign customers must be added a few Parisian rakes, amateurs of rare game, poachers of strictly guarded preserves, who applied to Tom as the most shrewd and clever medium, and also because they fancied that his uncouth French and difficulty of expression would keep their secrets safer. J. T.

Levis set his seal on all the scandalous stories at the end of the empire.

It was in J. Tom Levis' name that the pit box No. 9 at the Opéra Comique was engaged, behind the grating of which Baroness Mills hid herself an hour every evening to listen to her tenorino, and from which, after the cavatina was over, she would carry away, thrust among the lace of her bodice, his handkerchief, stained with perspiration and white lead. In J. Tom Levis' name too, was the small house hired, Avenue de Clichy, a house that he sublet to the two Sismondo brothers and for the same woman, without their being aware of it, for, as partners in the same bank, they were never free at the same moment. Ah! the agency ledgers at that time contained many a romance in a few lines!

*"A house with two entrances on the route de Saint Cloud. Rent, furniture, buying out present tenant—so much.*

And below :

*"General's Commission—so much.*

*"A country house at Petit Valtin, near Plombières; Garden, coachhouse, two entrances, buying out tenant—so much.*

Always followed by : *"General's commission."*

The general seemed to hold an important place in the agency's accounts!

If, however, Tom made a great deal of money in those days, he also spent a great deal, not in

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gambling, nor betting, nor on women, but in satisfying the caprices of a most uncivilised and childish nature, of a most fantastic and absurd imagination, which would brook no delay between its dream and the realization. On one occasion he chose to have an avenue of acacia trees at the end of his property at Courbevoie ; but, as trees grow but slowly, during eight days all along the banks of the Seine, very bare and black with factories at this spot, huge trucks could be seen toiling along, each one bearing an acacia, the green foliage of which, rocked by the slow motion of the wheels, was reflected on the water in quivering shadows. This suburban property which according to the English custom, J. Tom Levis inhabited all the year round, and which, at first was but a mere country box composed of a ground floor and attic, soon became for him a source of tremendous expense. By degrees, as his business prospered and extended, he had increased his little estate ; adding one building after another, one bit of land to another bit of land, till he finally found himself the possessor of a park made up of annexes, market gardens, and patches of brushwood ; a strange property, in which his tastes, ambitions, and English eccentricity revealed themselves, deformed and dwarfed still more, it is true, by the vulgarity of his ideas, and his futile attempts at artistic arrangements.

The old house had been heightened by an

additional upper story, over which extended an Italian terrace with marble balustrade, flanked by a couple of gothic towers, and communicating by a covered bridge with another building, a kind of Swiss cottage, with an open-work carved balcony



clothed with ivy. All this was built of bricks, plastered in stucco, and looked like a Nuremberg toy, with an abundance of turrets, battlements, weather-vanes, and dormer windows. Then the park bristled all over with kiosks and belvederes, glistened with glass houses, artificial lakes, and the black bastion of an immense reservoir topped by a real mill, the sails of which, stirred by the slightest

breath of air, flapped and turned with the perpetual grinding sound of their axle.

As the train rushes through the narrow strip of Parisian suburb traversed by the railway, many a grotesque villa no doubt defiles by the carriage window, like some vision or fantastic nightmare, the effort of some shop-keeper's brain and uncontrolled imagination running riot. None of them, however, can compare with Tom Lævis' folly, except it be the villa of his neighbour Spricht; the great Spricht, the illustrious ladies' tailor! This magnificent personage never stays in Paris longer than his business requires, just the three hours in the afternoon, when he holds his consultations (on finery) in his great laboratory on the boulevards; this over, he at once returns to Courbevoie. The secret of this enforced retreat, is that dear Spricht, the darling of all his customers, although he possesses in his drawers, tossed among the marvellous patterns of his Lyons silks, specimens of most of the delicate scrawls of the aristocracy of Paris, has been obliged to satisfy himself with this intimacy of correspondence; that he is not received by any of the people he dresses, and that his fine business connection has destroyed all intercourse with the commercial world to which he belongs. He therefore leads a very retired life, surrounded only, like all parvenus, by a swarm of poor relatives, and taking a pride in treating them right royally. The only distraction

he finds, that imparts the zest necessary to this kind of tabooced existence, is the neighbourhood and rivalry of Tom Levis, a rivalry made up of the hatred and contempt which they mutually feel for each other, without indeed knowing why, and which therefore is the more irreconcilable.

Whenever Spricht builds a turret—Spricht is a German—he has a passion for the mediæval, for castles, ruins, romantic glades, J. Tom Levis erects a verandah! When Tom knocks down a wall, Spricht cuts down all his hedges. There is a story of a pavilion built by Tom, which blocked Spricht's view in the direction of Saint Cloud. The tailor thereupon added a gallery to his pigeon-house. The other retorted by an additional story; Spricht would not be outdone, and the two buildings by dint of stones and workmen continued their ascension, till one fine night, a gust of wind blew them both down, not a difficult matter, seeing the lightness of the fragile constructions. On one occasion Spricht brought back from Venice a gondola, a real Venetian gondola, and moored it in the little harbour at the foot of his property; a week after, puff! puff! a pretty little steam-yacht came alongside Tom Levis' quay, stirring up in the water all the reflections of the turrets, roofs and battlements of his villa.

Had the empire lasted for ever, this extravagant style of living might have been kept up, but its last hour had come. The war, the siege, the

departure of all foreigners were for these two tradesmen a positive disaster, more especially for Tom Levis, whose property was devastated by the invasion, while that of Spricht was spared. But with the peace, the struggle recommenced more fiercely than ever between the two rivals ; this time however they did not start fair, for the great tailor saw all his customers come back to him, while poor Tom vainly awaited the return of his clients. The advertisement : “ Information, discretion, despatch,” brought in next to nothing, and the mysterious general no longer called for his clandestine commissions at the agency. Any other man than Levis would have put the drag on ; but this terrible fellow had contracted irresistible habits of expenditure ; his hands seemed unable to close. And then the Sprichts were there, mournful and lugubrious since the catastrophe, loudly proclaiming that the end of the world was nigh ; and they had built up at the end of their park, a reduced facsimile of the ruins of the Hôtel de Ville, with its crumbled walls blackened by the flames. On Sunday evenings, it was lighted up with coloured lights, and all the Sprichts raised a chorus of lamentations around it. It was a sinister sight. J. Tom Levis, on the contrary, from hatred of his rival, became a republican, celebrated regenerated France, organized regattas ; crowned *rosières*, and at one of these coronations, in a costly explosion of joy, carried off one summer’s night at the very

hour of the concerts, the band of the Champs Élysées, and brought it steaming up in his own yacht to Courbevoie.

At this rate his debts rapidly increased, but the Englishman did not betray any anxiety. No one better than he, knew how to baffle creditors by cool imposing impudence. No one—not even his well-trained clerks—came up to him, in his manner of curiously examining his creditor's bills, as though they were some strange old manuscripts, and then tossing them aside in a drawer with an air of superior indifference; nobody knew such tricks to avoid paying, to gain time. Time! that was all Tom Levis required to discover some profitable scheme, what he called "a great stroke," in the expressive language of Bohemian financialism. But in vain did he call for his cab, dash feverishly through the streets of Paris, anxiously, hungrily, watching for his prey, years passed by, and the great stroke did not come.

One afternoon, when the agency was swarming with people, a tall young man, with a languid and haughty mien, a mocking eye, thin moustache and pallid puffy good-looking face, went up to the principal wicket, and asked to speak with Tom Levis. The clerk, deceived by the peremptory tone of the request, took him for a creditor, and was already assuming his most disdainful manner, when the young man, in a sharp voice, the nasal inflec-

tion of which augmented the impertinent tone, bade the "conceited fool," go at once and tell his master that the King of Illyria wanted to speak to him. "Ah Monseigneur. Yes, Monseigneur." The cosmopolitan crowd turned with a movement of curiosity towards the hero of Ragusa. A swarm of clerks eagerly rushed from their compartments to escort his Majesty and usher him into Tom Levis' private room. The latter had not yet arrived, but could not fail to come in at any moment.

It was the first time that Christian came to the agency, the old Duc de Rosen having hitherto settled all the accounts of the little court. But to-day the King had to transact such a delicate and private affair, that he had not dared to confide so tender a morsel to the heavy jaws of his aide-de-camp. What he wanted, in fact, was to hire a house for a pretty horse-breaker who had just replaced Amy Férat in his affections, a furnished pavilion with servants and horses, and certain facilities of access, and all this to be ready within twenty-four hours. A feat that could only be accomplished through Levis' agency.

The room into which the king had been ushered contained only two arm-chairs in moleskin, a narrow silent gas-stove, the reflector of which seemed to throw back the fire from an adjacent room, and a small round table covered with a blue cloth on which lay a Paris Directory. Half the room was cut off by the high grating—

also draped in blue—of a large bureau, elaborately arranged, whereon was displayed above a great open ledger, with brass-bound corners, surrounded by ink-erasers, sand, rulers and pen-wipers, a long shelf full of books of the same size—the agency ledgers—their green backs forming a straight line like Prussian soldiers on parade. The scrupulous care bestowed on this silent nook, the fresh appearance of everything, did honour to the old cashier, absent at that moment, whose existence was evidently passed there.

While the king waited, stretched out in an arm-chair, his nose peeping out of his furs, suddenly, without a movement of the glass door leading to the public-room, or of the wide Algerian drapery—with a hole in the middle as in a drop scene—he heard behind the grating the slight scratching of a pen. Some one was seated at the desk ; not indeed the old white-headed clerk for whom the den seemed created, but the most delicious little woman that had ever turned over the leaves of a ledger. At Christian's gesture of surprise, she turned round, and enveloped him in a long soft glance, that suddenly drowned the sparkle in her eyes. The whole room was illumined by that look, and filled by the musical charm of a voice, almost trembling from emotion, that murmured : “ My husband is keeping you waiting very long, Monseigneur.”

Tom Levis, her husband ! The husband of this

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sweet creature with such a pale, refined profile, such elegant yet rich contours, like one of Tanagra's statuettes !

How did she happen to be there, alone in that cage, studying those big books, which threw white reflections on her ivory complexion, and of



which her little fingers had barely strength enough to turn the pages ? And this on such a bright, sunny day ; one of those February days, when the sun lights up all the lively gracefulness, the dresses, and the smiles of the ladies strolling down the boulevards. He advanced towards her, turning a compliment in which these varied impressions were mingled ; but his heart beat so loudly that he could

hardly speak ; and he was seized with one of those sudden ungovernable longings, such as he, the spoilt and blasé child, did not remember ever having felt before. In fact this type of woman, between twenty-five and thirty years of age, was utterly unknown to him. It was as far removed from the roguish curls of little Colette de Rosen, from the cool impudence and bold painted eyes of Amy Férat, as it was from the noble sadness and embarrassing majesty of the queen. Neither coquetry, boldness, nor proud reserve, nothing that he had ever met with in his own set, or in his relations with the demi-monde. This pretty woman, with her calm and domestic look, her beautiful dark hair, smooth like that of women who dress their hair in the morning for the rest of the day, who, draped in a plain violet-tinted, woollen gown, but for two enormous diamonds in her rosy ears, might have been taken for any ordinary female accountant ; suddenly appeared to him in her industrious captivity behind her wicket, like a Carmelite nun seen through the iron grating of a cloister, or an Oriental slave imploring help through the gilded trellis of her terrace. And she seemed, indeed, to have the submissive bewilderment, the bent profile of a slave ; and the amber shade at the roots of her hair, the straight line of her eyebrows, her half-parted lips, imparted an Asiatic stamp to this Parisian woman. Christian stood looking at her,

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and the figure of the bald-headed, ape-like husband rose up in his mind. How came she in the power of such a clownish fellow? Was it not a shameful robbery, a flagrant injustice!

The voice meanwhile went on slowly, softly apologizing:

“I am so distressed. Tom is so long. If your Majesty would kindly tell me what you require, I might perhaps——”

The king blushed, feeling slightly embarrassed. Never would he dare confide to this candid and obliging creature the somewhat ambiguous establishment he was meditating. She, however, insisted, and said, with a smile: “Oh! your Majesty can quite trust me. I keep the books of the agency.”

Her authority in business matters was patent, for at every moment, some clerk or another would come to the little round casement that opened from the private office into the public premises, and ask in a whisper for the most anomalous information: “They have sent for Madame Karitidès’ piano;” “The individual from the Hôtel Bristol has come.” She seemed acquainted with everything, answering by one word, or one cypher.

The king, disconcerted, wondered whether this angel in a shop, this ethereal being was really aware of all the intrigues and swindling of the Englishman.

“No, madam, my business is not urgent. At

least, I am no longer in a hurry. My ideas have entirely changed within the last hour."

He leant towards the grating as he stammered out these words, then suddenly paused, regretting his audacity, as he gazes at the placid activity of the woman, her long lashes almost sweeping the paper, while her pen moves along in regular lines. Oh! how he longed to tear her from her prison, to bear her off in his arms, far, far away, to whisper in her ears those soothing, tender words with which little children are lulled. The temptation was so strong, that he felt obliged to run away, and take leave abruptly, without stopping to see J. Tom Levis.

The night was closing in, foggy and cold.

The king, usually so chilly, did not perceive it; but sent away his carriage and went on foot to the Grand Club, through the wide thoroughfares that lead from the Madeleine to the Place Vendôme. His enthusiasm, his delight was so great, that he spoke to himself aloud, his hair flattened down on his eyes, which seemed filled with flickering flames. How many of these exuberant and light-footed joys do we not pass in the streets, and feel as though they left us some of their phosphorescence. Christian arrived at his club in this happy state, and did not notice the melancholy appearance of the long line of reception rooms, which were filled

with the gloom of the uncertain, unoccupied hour of twilight, more depressing still in these half-public places where the intimacy of home-life is lacking. The lamps were being brought in. A slow, languid game of billiards was going on at the further end, with the dull sound of the ivory balls upon the cushion ; a rustling of newspapers ; and the heavy breathing of a sleeper stretched out on the divan of the large drawing-room, whom the king, as he entered, disturbed. He turned round with a yawn that displayed his broken teeth, and stretched out his two lean arms, as he inquired in a dismal tone :

“ What is to be the lark to-night ? ”

Christian gave a cry of delight :

“ Ah ! prince, I was looking for you.”

The Prince d'Axel, more familiarly known as Queue-de-Poule, was evidently better acquainted than he with all the haunts of Parisian life. In the ten years the Prince had spent beating every corner of the boulevards he knew them from top to bottom, in all their length and breadth, from the steps of the Café Tortoni to the very gutter, and would no doubt be able to give him the information he required. Well aware of the only way of getting his Highness to speak, to loosen his dulled and heavy wits, which the wines of France—though he partook of them largely—had never succeeded in rousing ; any more than the fermenta-

tion of a vintage can inflate and send off like a balloon the huge iron-bound tun that contains it ; Christian quickly asked for a pack of cards. As the heroines of Molière are only witty, fan in hand, so d'Axel could only get up a little spirit in handling his beloved cards. The fallen majesty, and the heir apparent in disgrace, the two celebrities of the club, thereupon sat down to a game of Chinese bezique before dinner, the most *goummeux* of all games, because it needs no brains and permits the least skilful player to lose a fortune without making an effort.

"Tom Levis is married then ?" asked Christian, with assumed negligence, as he cut the cards. The other gazed at him with his lack-lustre, red-edged eyes :

"Did you not know ?"

"No. Who is the woman ?"

"Séphora Leemans, a celebrity."

The king started at the name of Séphora.

"Is she a Jewess ?"

"Probably."

There was a moment's silence. And indeed the impression left by Séphora must have been very strong, the smooth, oval face of the fair recluse, her brilliant eyes, her glossy hair must have been very bewitching, to triumph over the prejudice, and to linger in the memory of this Catholic Slave, haunted since the days of his infancy by the petty

pillage, the supposed witchcraft of the Bohemian Jews of his country. He continued his questions. Unluckily the prince was losing, and engrossed in his play, growled in his long, yellow beard :

“ I am awfully bored here—awfully bored.”

It was impossible to get a word more out of him

“ Capital ! here is Wattelet. Come here, Wattelet,” said the king to a great fellow who just then came into the room as noisy and full of life as a playful puppy.

This Wattelet, the favourite painter of the Grand Club, and of society generally, good-looking enough at a distance, but bearing visibly, on closer inspection, the marks of a life at high pressure, represented very exactly the modern artist who so little resembles the brilliant traditions of 1830. Dressed and curled in the height of fashion, this frequenter of salons and green-rooms had retained nothing of the student, save a certain swing and freedom of gait under the stiffer costume of a society man, and, in his ideas as well as his language, a somewhat similar carelessness ; a curl of mocking indifference lingering around the corners of his mouth. Brought to the club one day to decorate the dining-room, he had made himself so agreeable, so indispensable to all the members, that he remained a fixture, and was dubbed the organiser for life of the hitherto monotonous parties and fêtes ; he brought to these

pleasures all the freshness of a picturesque imagination, and of an education picked up in his wanderings through every grade of society. It was "My dear Wattlelet—my dear fellow," at



every turn. They could not do without him. He was the confidant of all the members of the club, of their wives, of their mistresses ; he would draw on one side of a card the costume of the Duchesse de V—— for the next embassy ball, and on the other

side of it, the airy skirt that was to flutter above the flesh-coloured tights of Mademoiselle Alzire, the duke's plaything of the moment. On Thursday, his studio was open to all his noble clients, who enjoyed the freedom, the unceremonious and eccentric gossip of the place, the mingled shimmer of colours proceeding from the tapestries, curiosities, lacquered furniture, and the canvasses of the artist himself; it was a style of painting essentially resembling the man, elegant, but just a trifle vulgar; mostly portraits of women, executed with a profound comprehension of the whole scale of Parisian trickery, false complexions, impossible heads of hair, a style of art in perfect sympathy with that costly bauble trailing its skirts and billowing its laces and gauzes—the modern woman—causing Spricht to say, with the condescending disdain of the parvenu tradesman for the painter who is just making his mark: “No one paints the women I dress as well as that fellow.”

At the king's first words Wattelet began to laugh.

“But, Monseigneur, that is little Séphora.”

“You know her?”

“Thoroughly.”

“Tell us then.”

And while the game between the two princes continued, the painter seated astride a chair, and full of pride at the intimacy in which he found himself, coughed, settled himself and assuming the

voice of the showman who explains the picture in his booth, he began :

“ Séphora Leemans, born in Paris about eighteen hundred and forty-five, six, or seven, in an old curiosity shop of the rue Eginhard, in the Marais, a dirty little musty bye-street between the passage Charlemagne and the church of Saint-Paul, the very heart of the Jews' quarter. Some day, as you drive in from Saint-Mandé, your Majesty should tell your coachman to drive through that labyrinth of little streets, you would see a wonderful bit of Paris. Such heads ! such houses ! a jargon made up of Alsatian and Hebrew ; shops, dens full of rubbish, with old clothes and rags stacked high before each door ; old hags with hooked noses sorting them, or stripping old umbrellas ; and then the dogs and vermin, and smells ! a real Ghetto of the middle ages, swarming with houses of the same period, iron balconies, high windows opening into lofts. Father Leemans however is not a Jew. He is a Belgian from Ghent, a Catholic ; and it is all very fine to call the girl Séphora, she is only a half-breed, with the skin and eyes of the race, but not the vulture nose ; on the contrary, a most charming little straight nose. I don't know where she can have it from ; father Leemans' is a jolly ugly one. My first medal at the Salon, that snout of his. Yes, it is quite true the old fellow shows, in a corner of the disgraceful hovel he calls his shop,

his full-length portrait, signed Wattelet, and not one of my worst bits of work, either. It was my way of getting inside the place to pay my court to Séphora, for I had a real *béguin* * for her just then."

"*A béguin ?*" said the king to whom the Parisian dictionary continually presented some fresh surprise. "Ah, yes ! I see. Go on."

"I was not the only one in love, I can assure you. All day long there was a procession through the shop in the rue de la Paix ; for I must tell you, Monseigneur, that old Leemans had at that time two shops. The old man was sharp enough to have understood the change that had taken place in curiosity dealing during the last twenty years. The romantic bric-à-brac dealer of poky streets, described by Hoffmann and even by Balzac, has given way to the dealer in curiosities settled in the midst of the luxurious parts of Paris, with the fine shop front and plenty of lighting. Leemans kept for himself, and real amateurs continued to haunt, his damp and dusty den in the rue Eginhard ; but for the public, the idler, for the Parisian who merely follows the lead and can swallow anything, he opened a superb shop in the rue de la Paix, which, with the deep-hued gold, the dark silver of the antique jewellery and the tanned colour of the laces, made the sumptuous modern jewellers and

* Infatuation.

goldsmiths' shops, in the same street, look pale. Séphora was fifteen then, and her serene youthful beauty was well set off by all these antiquities. And how intelligent she was, how clever at selling a thing, with as quick and certain an eye as her father for the value of a curio. Plenty of connoisseurs came to the shop to have the pleasure of touching her fingers, or the wavy silkiness of her hair, while leaning over the same glass case.

“The mother was never in the way ; the old hag, so black round the eyes that she looked as if she wore goggles, always sat darning, or poking her nose into some old piece of guipure or old scrap of tapestry, and took no trouble whatever about her daughter. And quite right too ! Séphora was a serious young person who could not be induced to stray from the paths of virtue.”

“Really,” said the king, appearing enchanted with the information.

“Your Majesty will judge by this. Old mother Leemans slept at the shop ; the daughter on her part, returned at about ten o'clock to the old den, so that her father might not be alone. Well, this splendid creature, whose beauty was celebrated, praised in all the papers, who could with a nod of her head have caused Cinderella's fairy coach to start up before her, used to wait every evening for the Madeleine omnibus and go direct from that to the nest of the paternal owl. In the morning as

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she started before the omnibus began to run, she walked, in all weathers, her black dress covered by a waterproof, and I can assure you that amid all the crowd of shop-girls who come pouring down the rue de Rivoli-Saint-Antoine, in hood, hat, or bare head, pale faced or smiling, fresh little throats coughing slightly at the early fog, ever pursued by some gallant, not one of them could compare with her."

"At what hour does she walk down?" growled the prince warming up.

Christian grew impatient.

"Let him finish. What next?"

"Then, Monseigneur, I managed to get a footing in the house of my charmer, and I worked my way gently. On a Sunday they would get up a little family game of *loto* with a few dealers from the passage Charlemagne. Pretty society! I always came back infested by fleas! Only I was able to sit beside Séphora, and tread on her toes beneath the table, while she looked at me with such a limpid and angelic gaze that I fully believed in her ignorance, purity and virtue. Then came a day, when looking in at their den rue Eginhard, I found all the place topsy-turvy, the mother in tears, the father furious, rubbing up an old arquebuse with which he vowed he would take vengeance upon the vile ravisher. The girl had just gone off with Baron Sala, one of old Leemans' richest customers, and the old fellow—I learnt afterwards—had himself

sold his daughter just like any old jewel or bit of ancient ironwork. For two or three years Séphora concealed herself and her septuagenarian lover in Switzerland, Scotland, on the borders of many a blue lake. Then I heard suddenly, that she had come back and had started 'a family hotel' at one end of the Avenue d'Antin. I hastened there. I found my former flame just as adorable and as calm as ever, at the head of a most miscellaneous table d'hôte—Brazilians, English, and ladies of doubtful virtue—a fine mixture. One half of the guests would still be eating salad while the other was already turning back the table-cloth to play baccarat. Here it was she first met J. Tom Levis ; not handsome, not young and not a penny to his name into the bargain. How did he attract her ? No one can say. What is certain, however, is that for his sake she sold her establishment, married him, helped him to set up the agency—at first prosperous and well-stocked, though now almost gone smash—so that Séphora, of whom one never caught sight, living the life of a recluse in the queer castellated villa Tom Levis had indulged in, made a fresh appearance only a few months ago in the character of a most seductive little book-keeper. By Jove ! the business felt the effect immediately. The pick of the clubs began to meet in the rue Royale. There was as much flirtation at the wicket of the office as formerly in the old curiosity

shop, or the office of the 'family hotel.' As for me, I am no longer in it. That woman frightens me. Always the same for the last ten years, not a wrinkle, not a line, with her long curling eye-lashes cast down, the circle of her eyes always young and fresh, and all that for the grotesque husband she adores ! It is enough to puzzle and discourage the most ardent."

The king shuffled the cards with annoyance :

"Nonsense !" he said, "that is impossible. An ugly devil, a baboon like Tom Levis, bald, fifteen years older than she is, who talks the slang of a pickpocket."

"Some women like all that, Monseigneur."

Here the Prince Royal in his vulgar and drawling accent interrupted :

"Nothing to be done with that woman. All the signals dead set against one. Not a chance. Line blocked."

"Oh ! by Jove, d'Axel, we know your way of making signals," said Christian, when he had mastered the meaning of this expression transferred from the lingo of the engine-driver to that of the fashionable *Gomme* of the day. "You have no patience. You like an undefended fortress. Hop, skip and a jump. But I declare that for a man who would give himself the trouble to get a little spoony on Séphora, who would not be put off by silence, disdain, and so on, it would only be the affair of a month. Not more."

“Bet you won't,” said d'Axel.

“How much?”

“Two thousand napoleons.”

“I take you. Wattlelet, ask for the book.”

This book, in which were entered the bets of the Grand Club, was as curious and instructive in its way, as that other one in the Levis den. The greatest names of the French aristocracy were here found attached to the most grotesque, foolish, and impossible bets; that, for instance, of the Duc de Courson-Launay who bet and lost every hair of his body and was unable for a fortnight to move a step in consequence. There were plenty of other bets yet more extravagant, and the signatures of heroes, inscribed on a hundred glorious deeds, were to be found ill-coupled in this record of folly.

Around the two parties to the wager, were grouped in respectful curiosity several members of the club. This ridiculous and cynical bet, excusable perhaps amid the laughter and intoxication of a parcel of hair-brained youths, assumed a different aspect when sanctioned by the gravity of all these bald heads, the social dignities they represented and the heraldic importance of the signatures to be appended, and the looker-on might have been persuaded he was assisting at the conclusion of some international treaty, regulating the destinies of Europe.

Thus it stood recorded:

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“ *This third day of February, eighteen hundred and seventy-five, his Majesty Christian II. wagers with H.R.H. the Prince d'Axel two thousand napoleons he gains the good graces of Séphora L—— before the end of the present month.*”

“ This would, perhaps, have been the occasion on which to sign Rigolo and Queue de Poule !” said Wattelet to himself, as he carried the book away, the shadow of an evil laugh flitting across his society-clown face.





VI.

THE BOHEMIAN SIDE OF EXILE.

“OH yes! we know all that. You old English Goddam. It is only when you wish neither to pay nor to answer that you use that kind of coin. But that won't serve to bamboozle me any longer. We must square accounts, you old rascal.”

“Really, Master Lebeau, you speak to me with a vehemence!”

And to give vent to this word “vehemence,” which he seems proud to include in his vocabulary, for he repeats it three or four times running, J. Tom Levis throws himself back and seems to dis-

appear within the vast white choker, of old-fashioned clerical type, that swathes his neck. At the same time his shifty glance turns and twists, masking behind his wide-open eyes his unfathomable thoughts; while his adversary's glance flickers and cringes beneath his lowered eyelids and replies to the rascally chatter of the Englishman, by the low cunning readable in his narrow weasel-like face. His thin hair, curled and frizzed, his austere black coat close buttoned to the chin, the extreme correctness of his appearance gives Maître Lebeau something of the air of an official prosecutor at the old Châtelet; but as there is nothing like argument, the anger born of interests in danger, to bring out the real character of a man, so it comes about that at this moment the elegant Lebeau, the oily gentlemanly fellow, polished as his own finger nails—the pet of royal ante-rooms, the quondam footman of the Tuileries, betrays himself as the hideous flunkey he really is, eager for gain and prey.

To shelter themselves from a spring shower that was plentifully washing the stones of the courtyard, the two cronies had taken refuge in the great coachhouse with whitened walls freshly washed over, and covered about half-way up with thick matting that protected from the damp the numerous splendid carriages standing there side by side, wheel to wheel, from the state coaches, all glass

and gilding, to the unpretending brake used for going to the meet, to the light mail phaeton of every-day use, and the sledge even, that the queen drove over the ice and snow when there was a frost ; each recalling, in the repose and the dim light of the coachhouse, the superb steeds that bear them forth—briskly or majestically—as the occasion requires. What completed the impression of comfort and luxurious idleness was the neighbourhood of the stables, whence came a sound of snorting, and resonant kicking against the woodwork, and the open saddle-room, showing a well-polished floor and wainscoting, the whips in the racks, the harness and saddles on their blocks, and round the walls the trophies of bridles and bits with their gleam of steel.

Tom and Lebeau argued in a corner and their voices raised in discussion mingled with the rain pattering on the asphalté paving. The valet in particular, feeling himself at home, talked at the top of his voice.

“ What a scoundrel this old thief of a Levis was ! Who could have supposed he would play such a trick ? When their Majesties left the Hotel des Pyramides for Saint-Mandé, who arranged the whole job ? Was it Lebeau, yes or no ? And that in spite of everyone, in spite of the greatest opposition. What was agreed upon in return ? Were they not to share all the commissions, all the tips of the tradesmen ? Come now, was that so or not ? ”

“Well, yes. It was like that.”

“Then why try to cheat?”

“No, no, cheat, never,” said J. Tom Levis, his hand on his shirt-front.

“Come, come, you old humbug. All the trades-people have given you forty per cent.; I have proofs of it. And you told me you only had ten. So that, on the forty thousand pounds that setting up the house at Saint-Mandé cost, I have for my part five per cent., that is two thousand pounds, and you, your thirty-five per cent., that is to say, seven times two thousand francs, that is to say, fourteen thousand pounds — fourteen thousand pounds—fourteen thousand pounds.”

He was choking with rage, this sum sticking in his throat like a fish-bone. Tom tried to calm him. To begin with, it was all very much exaggerated, and then the agent had had enormous expenses. The rent was raised on his place in the rue Royale; so much money out, so little coming in. Without taking into account that for him it was only a passing affair, could only happen once, while Lebeau was there always, and in a house where the expenses were over eight thousand pounds sterling a year, opportunities could not be wanting.

But the valet would not hear of this view of the case. His own affairs were no one's business, and assuredly, he was not going to be robbed by a wretched Englishman.

“Monsieur Lebeau, you are impertinent. I shall not waste any more time on you.”

Here Tom Levis turned towards the door. But the other blocked up the way. “Go without paying! Never.” His lips were pale. His weasel



face quivering with rage was pushed close to the Englishman's, who remained perfectly calm and so exasperating cool that at last the valet, enraged beyond measure shook his fist in his face with a coarse expression. With a back-hander, quick as a sword parry, and totally unlike the movement of a boxer, the Englishman knocked his fist away, and in

the very purest accent of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, said :

“ No more of that, my boy, or I'll strike.”

The effect of these few words was prodigious. Lebeau, stupefied, looked mechanically around him to see if it could really have been the Englishman who spoke ; then his glance settling on Tom Levis, with his rolling eyes and a sudden crimson overspreading his features, he was seized with a fit of uncontrollable mirth—in which yet shook a little of his recent anger—a mirth that finally communicated itself to the agent himself.

“ Oh, you confounded humbug ! I ought to have suspected you. No Englishman could be so terribly English as you are.”

They were still laughing, without having yet recovered breath, when the door behind them in the harness-room opened suddenly, and the queen appeared. A few moments ago she had stopped in the neighbouring stable, where she had herself fastened up her favourite mare, and she had not lost a word of the conversation. The treason having so low an origin affected her but little. She had long known what to think of Lebeau, the hypocritical valet, witness of all her humiliations, all her misery ; the other, the man of the “ cab,” she hardly knew—a mere tradesman. But from these people she now learned serious matters. So the establishment at Saint-Mandé had cost forty

thousand pounds, the existence they fancied so careful, so modest, cost eight thousand a year, and they had but two thousand at the most. How could she have been so long blind to the inadequacy of their real resources to the style in which they lived? Who then furnished the money for all these expenses? Who paid for them, for all this luxury, this house, these horses, carriages, even for her dress and her private charities? Shame burned in her cheeks at this thought while she went straight across the courtyard in all the rain, and rapidly mounted the little flight of steps to the steward's office.

Rosen, busy arranging bills on which lay piles of gold, started to his feet in the surprise of seeing her.

"No, remain seated," she said, abruptly, and, leaning over the writing-table, she laid her hand, still in its riding glove, upon it, with a resolute gesture of authoritative insistence :

"Rosen, on what have we lived for two years? Oh! no subterfuges! I know that all I thought only hired, is bought and paid for in our name. I know that Saint-Mandé alone has cost us more than forty thousand pounds, the forty thousand we brought from Illyria. You must tell me now who it is that has helped us since then, and from what hands we are receiving alms."

The dismayed countenance of the old man, the

piteous quiver of his thousand little wrinkles told Frédérique the truth.

“You!” she said. “It is you!”

She would never have dreamed of that. And the duke, excusing himself, stammered out the words: “duty—gratitude—restitution.”

“Duke,” said she, violently, “the king does not take away what he has once given, and a queen is not to be kept like a ballet-dancer.”

Two tears glittered in her eyes like sparks, tears of pride that did not fall.

“Oh, forgive me, forgive——”

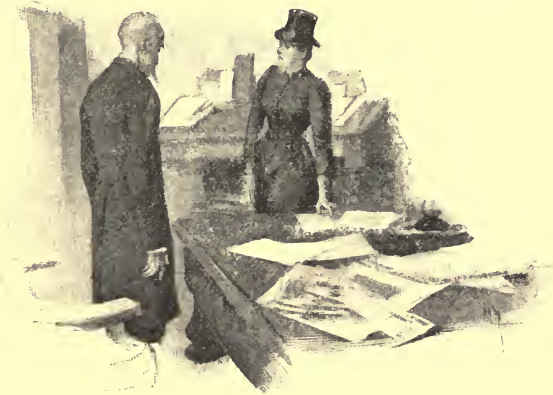
He was so humble and kissed her finger tips with such an expression of sad regret, that she continued somewhat softened:

“You will draw up a list of all your advances, my dear Rosen. A receipt shall be given you, and the king shall pay it off as soon as possible. As to future expenses, I intend to take charge of them, I will see that they do not exceed our income. We will sell both horses and carriages. The establishment shall be reduced. Exiled princes must be satisfied with little.”

The old duke started.

“Undeceive yourself, Madam. It is above all in exile that royalty needs all its prestige. Ah! if I had been listened to, it is not here, in a remote suburb with an establishment only fit for a sojourn at some watering-place that your Majesties would

have come to live. I would have had you in a palace, in the full tide of Parisian life, convinced as I am that what dethroned kings have most to fear is the indifference that gains upon them, when they have made acquaintance with the levelling familiarity, the jostling of the streets. I know I



have often been thought ridiculous with my points of etiquette, my childish and superannuated stickling for such things. And yet these forms are more important than ever; they help to keep alive the pride of bearing so easily lost in misfortune. It is the unyielding armour that keeps the soldier erect even when wounded to death."

She remained for a moment without replying, her open brow traversed by a thought that had just

occurred to her. Then she raised her head and said :

“ It is impossible. There is a dignity worth more than this. I intend from this evening that things shall be altered as I have now decided.”

Then he became more pressing, almost supplicating :

“ But your Majesty does not reflect—a sale of horses, carriages, a sort of royal bankruptcy, what a commotion it would make! What a scandal !”

“ What is going on now is still more scandalous.”

“ Who knows it? Who even suspects it? How should anyone suppose that Rosen, the old miser—. You yourself hesitated to believe it just now. Oh! Madame, Madame, I implore you to accept what you are pleased to call my devotion. To begin with, it would be attempting the impossible. If you only knew,—your revenues for the whole year would hardly supply the king with enough to pay his gambling debts.”

“ The king shall play no more, duke.”

This was said in such a tone, with such a glance that Rosen dared insist no longer. Nevertheless he permitted himself to add one more remark :

“ I will do what your Majesty wishes. But I implore you to remember that all I possess is yours, and that in a case of urgency I have at least deserved to be the first person applied to.”

He was perfectly certain the application must come before long.

On the morrow the promised reforms began. Half the servants were dismissed, the useless carriages sent to Tattersall's, where they were sold fairly well, with the exception of the state coaches, too showy and startling in appearance to suit private persons. They were got rid of, however, thanks to an American Circus that had just set up in Paris with a great flourish of trumpets ; and the splendid vehicles built by Rosen's orders, to preserve around his princes a little of the vanished pomp, and in the faint hope of a return to Leybach, served to show off the attractions of Chinese dwarfs and learned monkeys, historic processions and apotheoses à la Franconi. Towards the end of the representations, on the trodden and scuffed sand of the arena, these princely carriages, the coats of arms scarcely effaced from their panels, would be exhibited making the round of the circus to the entrancing strains of the orchestra, while out of the half raised windows leant some grotesque and grimacing figure, or the brutal close-cropped head and massive shoulders encased in pink silk fleshings of some famous gymnast bowing to the crowd, his forehead shining with pomatum and perspiration. What an omen for royalty ! All these cast-off relics of majesty fallen amid the spangles of a circus, between performing horses and wonderful elephants.

This sale at Tattersall's, coming on while that of the diamonds of the Queen of Galicia at the Hotel Drouot was still advertised on every wall—the two posters hanging side by side—made some noise. But Paris does not linger long over any one subject; ideas are as evanescent as the fleeting sheets of the newspapers. The two sales were talked of four-and-twenty hours. The next day, no one gave them a thought. Christian II. accepted without any resistance the reforms determined upon by the Queen; since his last disgraceful freak, he appeared almost confused in her presence, preserving the humble air of a reprovèd child and even accentuating the very childishness that made the excuse for all his follies. And after all what mattered to him the reforms in the house? His life, given up to dissipation and pleasure, was passed elsewhere. Strange to relate, for six months he did not once have recourse to Rosen's purse. This raised him a little in the Queen's eyes, and it was also a relief to her, not to see the fantastic cab of the English agent waiting perpetually in a corner of the courtyard, and no longer to meet on the stair-case the obsequious smile of this courtier-like creditor.

And yet the King spent a great deal, and plunged into pleasures of all kinds more wildly than ever. Whence did he procure the money? It became known to Elysée in the most singular manner, through old Uncle Sauvadon, the honest

fellow whose education as to "ideas upon things," he had formerly undertaken, the only one of his former acquaintances he still continued to visit since he had entered the household in the Rue Herbillon. From time to time he would breakfast with him at Bercy, take him news of Colette, whom the worthy soul complained he never saw. Colette was his adopted child, the daughter of a dearly loved penniless brother whom he had supported till his death. Always deeply interested in her, he had paid for her nurses and her christening robe ; later on, for her education in the most fashionable convent in Paris. She was his one vice, the living and moving personification of his vanity, the pretty doll on which he centred all the ambitions that swarmed in his vulgar parvenu millionaire's head ; and when in the parlour of the Sacré-Cœur, the little Sauvadon would say in a whisper to her uncle : "That girl's mother is a baroness, or duchess, or marchioness," the millionaire uncle would reply with a shrug of his big shoulders : "We will make something better of you than that." He made her a princess at eighteen. Princes in search of fortunes are not uncommon in Paris ; the Levis agency has quite an assortment on hand ; all that need be done is to fix the price. And Sauvadon considered eighty thousand pounds was not too much to pay for the privilege of appearing in a corner of the drawing-room on

evenings when the young Princesse de Rosen received, for the right of enlivening her guests with the broad smile that turned up the edges of his mouth, and made it look like the rim of a porringer between his short, stumpy, old-fashioned whiskers. Little grey eyes, full of vivacity and intelligence—Colette's eyes—in some sort attenuated the ingenuous, ungrammatical stutter that proceeded from the thick, unfinished mouth, with its horny lips, and the too evident vulgarity of those great square hands, which even in lemon kid gloves could not forget they had rolled casks on a quay.

At first he mistrusted himself, spoke but little—astonished, and even frightened people by his silence. It is not in a warehouse at Bercy, in the traffic of southern wines, doctored with fuscine or logwood, that a man can learn to speak with refinement. Then, thanks to Méraut, he acquired a few opinions ready made, a few bold aphorisms on the events of the day, the last new novel. The uncle spoke, and did not make too great an exhibition of himself, except indeed by a few formidable slips, fit to bring down the chandelier upon his head; and amazement was caused among the guests when this white-waistcoated, lumbering fellow expounded in picturesque language certain theories in the style of de Maistre. But one day the sovereigns of Illyria deprived him both of his provider of ideas and the means of showing them off.

Colette, detained by her functions as lady-in-waiting, no longer quitted Saint-Mandé ; and Sauvadon too well knew the head of the civil and military department to hope for admittance there. He did not even hint at it. Imagine the duke bringing such a man for presentation to the haughty Frédérique ! A wine merchant from Bercy ! And not a retired merchant even, but on the contrary, one in full swing of business ; for, notwithstanding his millions, notwithstanding the entreaties of his niece, Sauvadon was still at work, passed his life at the warehouse, on the quay, a pen behind his ear, his white hair all ruffled, in the midst of carters and bargees disembarking and loading up barrels ; or else beneath the huge trees of the park, now mutilated and cut up, in which rows and rows of his wealth, in the shape of innumerable casks, lay piled up in sheds. " I should die if I gave up work," he used to say. And, in fact, the noise and commotion of rolling barrels, and the good heady smell of wine rising up from these great stores in the damp cellars, where forty-five years before he had started life as journeyman cooper, were to him the very breath of life.

Here it was that Elysée sometimes came to see his former pupil, and enjoy one of those breakfasts that can only be tasted at Bercy, beneath the trees of the park or the vaulted roof of a cellar, the wine just drawn from the wood, the fish quivering

fresh from the fishpond, and local recipes for dressing them *en matelotes*, such as exist in the depths of Languedoc or the Vosges, lending them an extra savour. It was no longer now a question of ideas upon current subjects, since there were no longer any soirées to attend at Colette's ; but the worthy man liked to hear Méraut talk, to see him eat and drink freely, for he could never forget the garret in the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince, and treated Elysée as if he were still a waif of humanity, a touching consideration on the part of a man who had known hunger, towards one whom he knew to be poor. Méraut brought him news of his niece, of her life at Saint-Mandé, and left him a reflection of the grandeur of which, though it cost the good soul so dear, he was never a witness. No doubt he had the proud consciousness that the young lady-in-waiting dined with kings and queens, moved amid the ceremonial of a court ; but the vexation of not seeing her augmented his bad temper and his grievances against old Rosen.

“ What has he done to be so proud ? His name, his title ? Have I not bought them with my money ? His crosses, his medals, his stars ? Could I not have them if I wished ? That reminds me, my dear Méraut, you don't know. Since I last saw you, a piece of good luck has befallen me.”

“ What may that be, uncle ? ”

He called him "uncle" with an affectionate familiarity, which, thoroughly southern, came from his wish to give some form to the sympathy he felt for this stout merchant, though no similarity of feeling united them.

"My dear fellow, I have got the Lion of Illyria,



the commander's cross. So much for the duke who is so proud of his knight's garter. On New Year's day, when I go to pay my respects, I shall put on my star. That will teach him."

Elysée could not believe him. The order of the Lion! One of the most ancient, the most coveted in Europe, given to Uncle Sauvadon, to "my uncle." Why? For selling adulterated wine at Bercy?

"Oh, it is very simple," said the other, blinking

his little grey eyes. "I bought the grade of commander, just as I bought the title of prince. For a little more, I could have had the grand ribbon of the order, for that was for sale too."

"Where?" asked Elysée, turning pale.

"At the Levis agency, to be sure, Rue Royale. There is a little of everything to be found in that confounded Englishman's shop. My cross cost me four hundred pounds. The cordon was priced at six hundred, and I know some one who has purchased it. Guess who. Biscarat, the great hairdresser, Biscarat of the Boulevard des Capucines. But, my good fellow, what I am telling you is well known to all Paris. Just go to Biscarat. At the end of the great hall, where he officiates among his thirty assistants, you will see an immense photograph representing him as Figaro, razor in hand, and the broad ribbon of the order across his chest. The design is reproduced in miniature on all the bottles of the shop. If the general could see that, his moustache would bristle up, I fancy, eh? Like this, you know."

He tried to imitate the general's grimace, but as he had no moustache, the attempt was a failure.

"You have your patent, uncle? Will you let me see it?"

Elysée still cherished a hope that there might at the bottom of this affair be some forgery or cheating

trick familiar to the Levis agency. But no! All was regular, labelled in due form, stamped with the Illyrian arms, signed by Boscovich, and bearing King Christian's autograph. Doubt was no longer possible. A trade was carried on in crosses and cordons with the king's sanction; besides, to complete his conviction, Méraut had only on returning to Saint-Mandé to visit the councillor.

In the corner of the great hall which took up all the top floor of the house and served as study to Christian—who never studied—as gymnasium, fencing-room, library, he found Boscovich busy over his drawers, with great envelopes of whity-brown paper, sheets laid one above the other, wherein were drying the most lately gathered plants. During his exile the learned councillor had formed the groundwork of a new collection in the woods of Vincennes and Boulogne, which are richly stocked with the flora of France. In addition, he had bought the herbarium of a famous botanist lately dead; and, lost in the examination of his new riches, his bloodless, ageless head bent over the magnifying glass, he raised one by one with infinite precaution the heavy pages between which appeared flattened plants, their colours lost in pressing, and displayed fully from corolla to root. He uttered a cry of admiration and joy when the specimen was intact and well-preserved,

gazing at it long, with moist lips, reading aloud its Latin name and the notice written below on a little label. At another moment an exclamation of anger would escape him when he beheld the flower attacked and perforated by that imperceptible worm well-known to herborists, an atom born of the dust of plants and living upon it, which is the danger, often the destruction of collections. The stem yet held, but when the page was shaken all would fall and flutter away—flowers and roots alike, in a frail whirlwind.

“It is the worm, the worm,” said Boscovich, his glass to his eye, and with an air expressive of grief and pride, he pointed to a tiny perforation similar to that of the worm in wood, indicating the course the monster had taken. Elysée could no longer harbour a suspicion of him. This poor lunatic was incapable of an infamy, but also incapable of the least resistance. At the first mention of decorations he began to tremble and look askance over his magnifier, distrustful and timid. What did he hear? To be sure the king had lately caused him to prepare a quantity of patents of all grades with a blank for the name, but he knew nothing more, had never allowed himself to ask a question.

“Well, monsieur,” said Elysée, gravely, “it is right to warn you as councillor that the king trades in decorations with the Levis agency.”

Thereupon he related to him the story of the Gascon barber with which all Paris was just then amused. Boscovich uttered one of his little feminine cries, but in reality was not much scandalized, all that did not concern his mania having but little interest for him. The herbarium he had left at Leybach represented to him his country ; that which he was now getting together, exile in France.

“Just think how shocking, a man like you to lend a hand to such abominable jobbery !”

To which the other, annoyed to have his eyes opened for him to what he had no wish to see, replied :

“*Ma che, ma che!* What could I do, my good Monsieur Méraut ? The king is the king. When he says, ‘Boscovich, write that,’ my hand obeys without thinking, above all when his majesty is so kind and generous to me. It is he who, seeing how I grieved over the loss of my herbarium, made me a present of this one. Sixty pounds sterling, a wonderful bargain ! And, besides, into the bargain I got the *Hortus Cliffortianus* of Linnæus—first edition.”

Quite naïvely and cynically did the poor devil thus lay his conscience bare. It was dry and dead, the colour of a herbarium. His mania, cruel and heartless as the imperceptible insect that plagues the herborist, had perforated every part of his being, eaten away every fibre. He was unmoved

till Elysée threatened to tell the queen. Then only the monomaniac pushed his glass aside, and in a low voice, with the great deep sighs of a penitent at confession, he owned all. Many things went on under his eye that he could not prevent, yet that grieved him. The king's surroundings were deplorable. *E poi, che volete?* He had no vocation for being a king, no taste for a throne. He had never had it. For instance, I remember how long ago it is, in the lifetime of the late Leopold, when the king was seized with his first attack as he left the dinner-table, and they came and told Christian he would doubtless soon succeed his uncle, the child—he was barely twelve years old and was playing croquet in the *patio* (court-yard) of the palace—the child began to cry terribly, a regular nervous attack. He said: “I don't want to be king, I don't want to be king. Let them put my cousin Stanislas on the throne instead of me.” I have often recalled since, on seeing it again in the glance of Christian II., the terrified and bewildered expression that he had that morning, clinging with all his might to his mallet, as if he were afraid he would be carried off to the throne-room, and crying: “I don't want to be king!”

All Christian's character was expressed in this anecdote. No doubt he was not a wicked man, but a child-man, married too young, with seething passions and hereditary vices. The life he led—

the nights at the club, the uproarious suppers, the society of loose women, which in certain circles constitutes the normal life of a husband—all this was aggravated in him by his *rôle* of king, which he was incapable of playing, the responsibilities that were above his strength and conception, and above all by the exile that was slowly and surely demoralizing him. Firmer natures than his cannot always resist the dissolving effects of broken habits, and constantly renewed uncertainty, combined with the groundless hopes, the anguish, the strain of waiting. Like the sea, exile has its moments of torpor ; it lowers and benumbs. It is a phase of transition. Only by fixed occupations and regular hours of study can the tedium of a long sea voyage be withstood. But how can a king occupy himself who has neither people, nor ministers, nor council ; nothing to decide, to sign ; far too much wit or scepticism to amuse himself with the pretence of all these things, and too much ignorance to attempt any diversion in the direction of any other steady work ? Then exile, if it resembles the sea, resembles also shipwreck, throwing the privileged saloon passengers overboard pell-mell with the steerage and deck passengers. A truly haughty spirit, a real kingly temperament is needed to avoid the effects of the familiar and lowering promiscuity which afterwards may cause blushes and shame ; to remain a

king amid the privations and distress that confound all ranks in the uniform misery of humanity.

Alas! that Bohemia of exile from which the Duc de Rosen had so long, and at the price of such sacrifices, preserved the house of Illyria, began to invade it at last. The king had arrived at all kinds of expedients to pay the expenses of his constant round of pleasure. He began by floating bills, just like any young fellow, finding it just as simple and even easier, with the aid of J. Tom Levis, as those "drafts upon our treasury," that he used formerly to address to the head of the civil and military department. The bills came due, were augmented by a host of renewals, until the day when Tom Levis, finding himself run dry, invented that pretty traffic in patents, since the business of a king without either a kingdom or a civil list presented no other resource. The poor Lion of Illyria, cut up like some common beast for the butcher, was divided into quarters and slices, sold at the stall and by auction at so much the mane, the sirloin, the rib, and the claws. And this was only the beginning. Once in Tom Levis' cab the king was not likely to pause on so fair a road. So said Méraut to himself as he came away from Boscovich. He saw well enough that no dependence could be placed upon the councillor, easy to overrule, as are most people with a mania. He himself was too great a stranger, too newly

entered into the household to have any influence over Christian's mind. Should he address himself to old Rosen? But at the tutor's very first words the duke darted upon him the terrible glance of one whose religion is insulted. The king, however low he might fall, was always the king for him. Nothing could be hoped either from the monk, whose wild visage only appeared at long intervals between two journeys, each time thinner and more weather-beaten.

The queen? but she was, he had noticed for months past, sad and feverishly anxious, her beautiful brow always clouded with care, and when she attended the lessons she only listened abstractedly, with absent mind and hand listlessly drooping over her work. She was filled with grave preoccupations, hitherto unknown to her, that touched her to the quick, coming as they did from so low a source, anxieties about money, the shame of all these outstretched hands that she could no longer fill. Tradesmen, the poor and needy, the companions of her exile and misfortune, all remained waiting; for kingship has its duties, even when it has no longer its rights. Those who had learnt their way to the house in its prosperity, waited now for hours in the ante-rooms, and often, tired of waiting, went away with bitter words, which the queen guessed, without hearing, by their discontented step, by the weariness they betrayed, which told of their constant disappointments. She

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tried in earnest to put some order into their new way of life ; but bad luck attended her efforts, bad investments, shares paying no interest. They must either wait or lose all. Poor Queen Frédérique, who thought she had known the whole gamut of suffering, had yet to learn those miseries that wither and fade ; the hard wounding contact of common daily life. There were pay-days at the end of the month which kept her awake thinking at night, shivering like a worried business man. Sometimes, when the servants' wages were behindhand, she dreaded to read in the delayed execution of an order, in a glance less respectful than usual, the dissatisfaction of a domestic. Finally she became acquainted with debt, debt which grows little by little more harassing, and forces open, in the insolence of pursuit, the highest, the most gilded doors. The old duke, grave and silent, watched all the anxieties of his queen, and hovered round her as if to say : " I am here." But she was quite determined to exhaust all other means before taking back her word, before having recourse to him whom she had crushed with so haughty a reprimand.

One evening the little court was assembled in the great drawing-room, a monotonous evening as it always was, while the king as usual was absent. Whist began under the lights of the great silver candelabra,—what they called the queen's play ; the duke had the queen for a partner, with



Madame Eléonore and Boscovich for adversaries. The princess played softly on the piano some of those "echoes of Illyria" that Frédérique was never weary of hearing, and which at the least sign of satisfaction the musician converted into a war-song or march. These evocations of the fatherland that called up on the faces of the card-players a tearful or an heroic expression, were the only breaks in the atmosphere of habitual resignation to exile, that prevailed in the luxurious bourgeois drawing-room that chanced to shelter royalty.

Ten o'clock struck.

The queen, instead of retiring to her own rooms, as on other evenings, and thus giving the signal of departure, threw an absent glance around her and said :

"You can retire. I have some work to do with Monsieur Méraut."

Elysée, busy reading by the fireside, bowed and shut up the pamphlet he was perusing, went into the schoolroom in search of pens, ink, and paper.

When he returned the queen was alone, listening to the carriages rolling out of the courtyard, while the great doors were shut, and the lobbies and staircases of the house echoed with the sounds of coming and going, that in a numerous household precede the hour for repose. There was silence at last, silence increased and deepened by two miles of woods, which deadened with the wind and the rustling of the leaves the far-off rumble of Paris. The deserted

drawing-room, still blazing with light in this calm solitude, seemed prepared for some tragic scene. Frédérique, her elbow on the table, pushed away with the other hand the blotting-book Méraut had prepared.

“No, no,” said she, “we shall not work to-night; it was only a pretext. Sit down and let us talk.”

Then, still lower, she added :

“I have something to ask you.”

What she had to say probably cost her a great effort to bring forth, for she gathered herself together for a few moments, mouth and eyes half closed, with the profoundly painful and aged expression that Elysée had already noticed sometimes upon her countenance, and which made the beautiful face yet more beautiful in his sight; all the self sacrifices, the devotion, the noble sentiments of the queen and woman engraved on its pure features; and when she looked thus, she inspired him with a respect that was almost religious. At last, summoning all her courage, in low and timid tones, letting her words fall one after the other like fearful footsteps, Frédérique asked him whether he knew of one of those places in Paris where—one of those places where—money could be borrowed on a pledge.

Imagine such a question put to Elysée, to that thorough Bohemian who knew every pawnshop in Paris, who had made use of them for the last twenty years as store-houses, where he put his

winter clothes in summer and his summer clothes in winter. Did he know the "*spout?*" Did he know "*my uncle?*" In the recollections of youth that rose to his mind, this slang of destitution made him smile for a moment. But the queen went on, trying to steady her voice :

"I wished to ask you to take something there for me—some jewels ; there are at times difficult moments."

And in her beautiful eyes, now raised to his face, was revealed the unfathomable depths of a calm but overwhelming grief.

Kings in such destitution ! so much grandeur humbled to the dust ! Was it possible ?

Méruant gave her to understand by a bow that he was willing to take charge of anything she pleased.

If he had uttered a word he must have sobbed ; if he had permitted himself a gesture, it would have been to fall at the feet of this august distress. And with it all his admiration began to soften into pity. The queen now seemed to him a little less remote, a little nearer drawn to the vulgarities of existence, as if in the sad avowal she had just made, he had felt a touch of Bohemianism that presaged the beginning of a fall, and brought her closer to him.

All at once she rose and took from its crystal case, the antique and neglected relic, which when placed on the table-cover, gleamed like a handful of jewels of all colours.

Elysée started. The crown !

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“Yes, the crown! For six hundred years it has been in the royal house of Illyria. Kings have died, rivers of noble blood have flowed in its defence. Now it must help us to live. It is all we have left.”

It was a magnificent closed crown in the finest old gold, the arches of which, enriched with much ornamentation, were united above the crimson velvet cap. Upon the arches, on the lower circlet of wreathed filigree, in the centre of each flower that imitated the leaves of the trefoil, at the points of the festooned work supporting these flowers, were closely set every variety of known precious stone: here figured the transparent blue of the sapphire, the velvety cerulean of the turquoise, the morning gleam of the topaz, the flame of the oriental ruby, emeralds like drops of water on the foliage, cabalistic opals, pearls of milky whiteness, and surpassing all, diamonds crowded everywhere, catching and reflecting in their facets all these various hues of fire, and like a luminous dust, a cloud crossed by a ray of sunlight, softening and melting together the splendour of the diadem already drilled by the hand of time, yet gleaming with the delicate reflections of a silver-gilt lamp twinkling in the depths of a sanctuary.

The queen placed her trembling finger upon it, here and there:

“Some of the stones must be prized out—the biggest.”

“What with?”

They spoke in low tones like two criminals.

But seeing nothing in the drawing-room that would serve their purpose :

“Bring a light,” said Frédérique.

They passed into the glass verandah, where the



tall lamp held on high threw fantastic shadows and a long trail of light that finally was lost on the lawns, in the black night of the garden.

“No, no, not scissors,” she murmured, seeing him turn towards her work-basket. “They are not strong enough ; I have already tried ”

At last they discovered the gardener's pruning-shears laid on the tub of a pomegranate shrub, the delicate foliage of which caught the moonlight from behind the glass. Both returned to the drawing-room, and Elysée tried with the points of the instrument to raise an enormous oval sapphire that the queen pointed out to him ; but the great uncut jewel, firmly set, resisted and slipped under the iron, immovable in the claws that held it. Moreover, the hand of the operator, fearing to spoil the stone, or to break the setting which already bore scratches on its gold, testifying to former attempts, was neither sure nor steady. The poor royalist suffered torments of indignation at the outrage he was compelled to offer to the crown. He felt it quiver, resist, struggle beneath his touch.

"I cannot, I cannot," he said, wiping away the perspiration from his brow.

The queen replied :

"You must, you must !"

"But it will be seen !"

A smile of proud irony crossed her face.

"Be seen ! Who so much as glances at it ? Who thinks of it, who cares for it here, but I ?"

And while he resumed his task, pallor on his bent face, his long locks hanging over his eyes, and held between his knees the royal diadem which his pruning-knife was about to hack and dismember, Frédérique, holding the lamp above him, watched the sacrilege, as cold as the stones that gleamed

amid scraps of gold on the table-cover, intact and splendid notwithstanding the violence they had endured.

The following day Elysée, after being out all the morning, came in after the first summons for breakfast, and seated himself silently at table, troubled and agitated, scarcely mingling in the conversation of which he was habitually the main-spring and enlivener. This agitation at last infected the queen without, however, in any way altering her smile or the serenity of her deep contralto voice ; and when the meal was ended, it was still a long time before they drew near each other or could talk freely, feeling themselves hemmed in on all sides by the etiquette and rules of custom established in the house, the attendance of the lady-in-waiting, the jealous watchfulness of Madame de Silvis. At last came lesson time. While the little prince got out his books and settled himself :

“What is the matter ?” asked Frédérique.

“What has happened ?”

“Oh, madame ! all the stones are false !”

“False !”

“And most carefully imitated in paste. How can that have been done ? When ? By whom ? There must be a thief in the house !”

She had turned horribly pale at the word “thief.” Suddenly from between clenched teeth, with a flash of anger and despair, that smote like a blow in her eyes :

“True! There *is* a thief here. You and I know him well.”

Then with a feverish gesture, she seized Elysée’s wrist in a vehement grasp, as if to seal a secret compact between them.

“But we shall never denounce him, you promise?”

“Never!” he answered, turning away his eyes, for with one word they had understood each other.





VII.

AT THE FAIR.

It was the afternoon of the first Sunday in May, a glorious bright day, fully a month in advance of the season and so warm that Queen Frédérique, the little prince and his tutor were driving in an open carriage in the woods of Saint-Mandé. The first soft caress of springtide, wafted through the fresh foliage, had cheered the queen's heart

and infused fresh life into her cheeks. She felt happy without knowing why, and forgetting for a few hours amid the universal kindness of nature the harshness of life, sat ensconced in a corner of the heavy carriage, her child nestling against her, and conversed in an intimate and friendly manner with Elysée Mériaut, who sat opposite them.

“It is strange,” she said; “it seems to me that we have already met before becoming acquainted. Your voice, your face, at once awoke some recollection in my mind. Where can we have met for the first time?”

Little Zara remembered well enough that first interview. It was at the convent, far away, in that underground church, where Monsieur Elysée had frightened him so terribly. And in the gentle timid glance the child cast at his master, there was still a little of that superstitious fear. No! even before that Christmas night, the queen felt convinced they had met.

“Unless it was in a former existence,” she added half seriously.

Elysée laughed.

“It is true, your Majesty is not mistaken. You saw me, not indeed in a former existence, but in Paris, the very day of your arrival. I was in front of the *hôtel des Pyramides*, standing on the stone basement of the Tuilerie railings.”

“And you cried out ‘*Vive le roi!*’ Now I remember. Yes it was you. Oh, I am glad. It was you who first welcomed us. If you knew how much good your cry did me!”

“And to me also!” replied Méraut. “It was such a time since I had had an opportunity of uttering that triumphant cry: *Vive le roi!* It had hovered so long upon my lips. It is a family cry, associated with all the youthful joys of my childhood, in which at home all our emotions and all our faith was summed up. That cry, as I utter it, recalls to life the southern accent, the gesture and voice of my father; and brings back to my eyes the same emotion I have seen so often in his. Poor man! It was an instinctive cry on his part, a whole creed contained in one word. One day as he was crossing Paris on his return from a journey to Frohsdorff, my father passed on the Place du Carrousel just as Louis-Philippe was about to come out. A crowd standing close by the railings awaited him,—an indifferent, almost hostile crowd such as is seen towards the end of a reign. My father, hearing that the king is expected, shoves and pushes till he elbows himself into the first rank, in order to have a good stare, and to crush by his contemptuous glance that thieving rascally fellow Louis-Philippe who has stolen the throne from the legitimate king. Suddenly the king appears, crosses the deserted courtyard, amid

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a death-like silence, a heavy silence that seems to oppress the whole palace, and through which the sounds of the loading of the insurgents' muskets and the crashing of the throne seem to be distinctly heard. Louis-Philippe, already old and very homely looking, advanced slowly, umbrella in hand, with the little short steps of a fat man, towards the gate. Nothing kingly, nothing regal about him. But my father did not see him thus ; and at the sight of this representative of royalty, crossing the threshold of the great palace of the kings of France, so full of glorious mementoes, amid the terrible solitude the hatred of a people creates around a prince, something was stirred and roused within him ; he forgot all his rancour, suddenly and instinctively snatched off his hat, and cried or rather sobbed out a '*Vive le roi*,' so heartfelt and enthusiastic, that the old king started and thanked him by a long glance full of emotion."

"I must have thanked you in the same way," said Frédérique, and she looked at Mèraut with such affectionate gratitude in her eyes that the poor fellow turned pale. Then, absorbed in the narrative she had just heard, she added :

"Your father was not of noble birth, was he ?"

"Oh, no, madam. He was of the people, a humble weaver."

"Strange," she said, musing.

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He made some reply, and their eternal discussion was resumed. The queen did not like, could not understand the people, and had a kind of physical horror of that class. She considered them brutal, terrible in their pleasure as well as in their revenge. Even during the festivities of the coronation, in the honeymoon of her reign, she had feared them, and had shrunk from the thousand hands outstretched to acclaim her, but which she felt held her prisoner. Never had they been able to understand one another ; favours and bounties had fallen from her, but had failed to bring forth gratitude, like the accursed seed that cannot germinate, without its being possible to hold the hardness of the soil or the sterility of the grain responsible for the failure.

Among the many fairy tales with which Madame de Silvis had filled the little prince's imagination, there was one about a young Syrian girl, married to a lion, who felt a dreadful terror of her tawny husband, of his roar and his violent way of shaking his mane. The poor lion, however, was full of delicacy and lover-like attentions ; he brought honeycombs, and all kinds of choice game to his child-wife, and watched over her while she slept, imposing silence upon the sea, the forest, and the wild beasts. All was in vain ! Her repulsion, her offensive dread was incurable ; and at last the lion's anger was roused, and he roared a terrific " Go ! "

with open jaws and bristling mane, as though more inclined to devour her than to set her free. It was rather the story of Frédérique and her people ; and since Elysée had lived in such close intimacy with her, he had vainly striven to make her comprehend the latent kindness, the chivalrous devotion, the fierce touchiness of this great lion, who roars so often in play before his wrath breaks forth. Ah ! if only kings had known ! If they had known how to trust their people ! And as Frédérique shook her parasol with an incredulous air :

“ Ah, yes, I am well aware of your dread of the people. You do not like them, or rather you do not know them. But if your Majesty would but look around in those avenues, through those trees, at these simple, good-natured folk, strolling about and amusing themselves, enjoying to their hearts' content a day of rest, and revelling in the sunlight, they are, nevertheless, the inhabitants of that terrible faubourg of Paris, the terrible faubourg that breeds revolutions, and pours down its infuriated masses through the torn-up streets of Paris.”

From the great avenue through which the carriage was slowly making its way, under the still sparse thickets, sprinkled violet with the early wild hyacinths, could be seen luncheons spread out on the ground, white plates dotted over the grass,

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open-mouthed baskets, and common thick glass from the neighbouring wine-shop stuck among the green shoots like great peonies ; shawls and smock-frocks suspended to the boughs ; men in shirt-sleeves, women without cloaks, reading, dozing, or sewing as they leant against the trees ; bright glades flecked by skirts of cheap fabrics, flitting hither and thither in some game of battledore, blind-man's buff, or quadrilles improvised at the sound of an invisible band, the melody of which reached them in gusts. And children, numbers of children, connecting links between the luncheons, and the games, running together from one group to another, leaping, shouting, filling the whole wood with an immense swallow-like twitter, their endless going and coming through the trees, recalling in their rapidity, the caprice of the birds' shadowy flight. Compared with the carefully tended, neatly kept Bois de Boulogne, and its little rustic palings, this Bois de Vincennes, with all its avenues unobstructed, seemed well suited for the pastimes of a people merry-making, with its green trampled turf, its strong arching trees, as though Nature herself had here chosen to be more kindly and more full of life.

Suddenly a turn of the avenue revealed an open space, with a bright lake and grassy green slopes, and drew an exclamation of delight from the royal child. It was lovely, resembling the sudden

glimpse of the sea through the winding stone walls of a Breton village, bringing its ripples to the very foot of the last steep lane. Boats decked out with flags, full of oarsmen in smart red or blue jerseys, covered the lake in every direction, furrowing the surface with the silvery stroke of the oars, and the white foam of the sparkling little waves. Flocks of ducks quacked and swam about, swans in a more stately manner sailed along the banks, their downy feathers filled out by the breeze, while in the distance, hidden behind the green foliage of an islet, a band sent to all parts of the wood a joyous rhythm that re-echoed across the surface of the lake. Over all this reigned a merry disorder, the movement of both wind and water, the flapping of the streamers, the shouts of the boatmen, the groups of people seated on the slopes, of children running about, of two little noisy cafés built almost in the water, their wooden floors as resonant as a bridge, and their disjointed plank walls giving them the appearance of something between a bathing machine and a steamer. Few carriages were to be seen round the lake. From time to time a railway cab, loaded with a workman's wedding party, easily recognisable by the new cloth of the frockcoats and gaudy colours of the women's shawls; or tradesmen's vans full of stout dames in flowery bonnets, who looked with an air of condescension at the passers-by, dragging their steps through the sand.


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Most of all, little baby carriages, that first outlay of the married workman, perambulating cradles in which the infant faces nod their frilled caps, drowsily gazing at the blue sky through the entwined branches.

Amid all these modest vehicles the queen's equipage, with the Illyrian coat-of-arms on its panels, its handsome horses and liveries, could not pass without attracting some notice. Frédérique had never been there, except on week-days; the working men's families, silent and awkward in their Sunday attire, nudged each other's elbows, stepping aside at the sound of the wheels, then turned round, unsparing of their admiration for the haughty beauty of the queen, and the aristocratic air of little Zara. Now and again a little daring voice would call out from under the trees: "Good day, Madame." Could it be Elysée's words, or the splendour of the weather, or the joyousness spread even to the horizon, which the silent factories for once left clear and truly rural, or was it the cordiality of these chance greetings? Frédérique could not help feeling a sort of sympathy for these working men on their holiday; for the cleanliness that, considering their hard labours and their rare moments of leisure, was so praiseworthy. As for Zara, he could hardly contain himself; he stamped and fidgetted in the carriage; he would have liked to get out, roll with

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the other children on the grass, and row about in the boats.

Presently the carriage reached a less noisy part of the wood, where people were reading or sleeping on benches; and loving couples passed along among the shrubs arm in arm. Here the shade was deeper and more mysterious; holding the damp coolness of great forests. The birds twittered in the branches. As they got further from the lake, where the noise of the crowd was concentrated, the echo of another fête reached their ears: shots fired off, beating of drums, the noise of bells and bugles rising above a great clamour that passed like a cloud across the sun. It sounded like the sacking of a town.

“What is that? What sound is that?” asked the little prince.

“It is the gingerbread fair, Monseigneur,” said the old coachman turning round on his box, and as the queen consented to go in that direction, the carriage left the park and turned down a set of narrow unfinished streets, where new six-storied houses rose by the side of miserable hovels, with a stable gutter on one side and market-gardens on the other. All around small wine booths, with their arbours, little tables, and the stands of swings painted in an ugly uniform green. It was crowded with people, shoals of soldiers, in gunners’ shakos and white cotton gloves. But there was little noise.

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An ambulating harpist or violinist was playing between the tables, scraping airs from the *Favorita* or the *Trovatore* ; and the people of Paris listened with interest to the sentimental music it is so fond of, always prodigal of alms to those who give it pleasure.

Suddenly the carriage stopped. Vehicles were not allowed to go further than the entrance of this broad avenue of Vincennes, along which the fair was established, and whose background towards Paris was the dusty atmosphere of the suburb with the two columns of the *barrière du Trône* rising above it. Zara's eyes were lit up with such an intense childish longing at the sight of the happy crowd in that long street of booths that the queen proposed to get out. It was so extraordinary a wish on the part of the proud Frédérique to set foot in the dust of this plebeian Sunday, that Elysée hesitated for a moment.

“Is there any danger?” said the queen.

“Oh, not the least, Madam. Only, if we go into the fair, we had better go alone. The servants' liveries would attract attention.”

On receiving the queen's order, the tall footman who was preparing to follow them, got back on to the coach-box and it was arranged the carriage should wait for them. They would certainly not go through the whole fair, and only intended walking a little and looking at a few of the booths.

At the entry they saw small moveable stands, a table covered with a white napkin, shooting galleries with rabbits for prizes, and wheels of fortune. People passed by indifferent and without stopping. Then they came upon open-air frying booths, exhaling a strong smell of burnt fat, great red flames rising up, while scullions dressed in white were busily engaged serving out piles of sugared fritters. Further on was a confectioner, pulling, twisting into gigantic rings the white marsh-mallow paste perfumed with almonds! The little prince gazed in astonishment. It was all so new to him, poor little caged bird, reared in the upper rooms of a palace, behind the gilt railings of a park, grown up amid terrors and mistrust, who had never gone out unaccompanied, never seen the populace but from some balcony or some carriage surrounded by guards. At first somewhat intimidated, he walked close to his mother, pressing her hand tightly in his, but little by little he became excited with the noise, the odour of the fête, the tunes of the hurdy-gurdies made him long to run wildly about, and he dragged Frédérique forward, at the same time that he wanted every moment to stop, divided between the wish to see everything and a desire to push on and reach the spot where the noise was louder, the crowd denser.

Thus without noticing it, they went further and

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further from their starting-point, imperceptibly and unconsciously, like a swimmer borne away by a current, the more easily too, that among all the gaudy dresses flaunting about, the queen's neat costume, dress, mantle and bonnet matching in soft fawnlike tints, passed unnoticed, as did also Zara's big turned-down collar, bare legs and short jacket, the quiet elegance of his attire merely drawing the attention of a few old women who remarked: "That's an English boy." He walked between Elysée and his mother, who exchanged smiles over his head. "Oh mother!" he would exclaim, "look at that! Monsieur Elysée, what are they doing over there? Let us go and see!" From one side of the avenue to the other, describing endless zig-zags, they penetrated deeper and deeper into the crowd, following its onward direction.

"Shall we go back?" suggests Elysée; but the child is drunk with excitement. He implores, tugs at his mother's hand, and she is so happy at seeing her little drowsy child roused from his torpor, she is herself so excited by the popular ferment, that they go on advancing.

The day becomes warmer, as though the sun in going down caught up with the tips of its rays a stormy mist; and as the sky changes, the fête with its thousand varied colours assumes a fairy-like aspect. Now is the time for the shows—the whole staff of the circus and booths are outside, under the

entrance awnings, in front of the painted canvas which, swelling and bulging in the wind, impart a semblance of life to the monstrous animals, gymnasts and Hercules painted on it. Here is the display in front of the great military play : an exhibition of costumes of the time of Charles IX. and Louis XV., arquebuses, guns, periwigs and plumes mixed up together ; the *Marseillaise* clanged out by the brass band, while opposite, the young horses of a circus, with white reins, like bridal horses, prance learnedly about on a platform, count with their hoofs and bow their heads. Next to these a true mountebank show exhibits a clown in motley costume, tiny Astecs in scanty tights, and a big tanned girl in pink ballet-skirt who juggles with gold and silver balls, bottles and glittering tin knives mingling and jingling over her elaborately dressed hair, held together by glass pins.

The little prince is lost in mute contemplation before this magnificent personage, when a queen, a true queen of fairy tales, with a brilliant crown, a short tunic of spangled gauze, her legs crossed over each other, leans upon the balustrade. Zara would never tire of looking at her, but the orchestra claims his attention ; an extraordinary orchestra this, composed not of French guards, or Hercules in pink tights, but of real ladies and gentlemen ; a gentleman with short whiskers, shining pate and patent leather boots, deigns to play the cornet-à-

piston ; while a lady, a real lady, almost as solemn as Madame de Silvis herself, in a silk mantle, and nodding flowers in her bonnet, bangs on the big drum, looking right and left with an air of



supreme indifference, her violent motions meanwhile tossing the chenille fringe of her mantle high among the roses of her bonnet. Who knows? this may be some royal family also fallen into misfortune. But the fair presents yet other attractions.

In the infinite and perpetually varying panorama were to be seen bears dancing at the end of their chains ; negroes in cotton drawers, devils—male and female, with narrow red bands round their heads ; gesticulating wrestlers, undaunted combatants, hand on hip, swinging aloft the tights prepared for any volunteer fighter ; a fencing-mistress in cuirass-bodice, red stockings embroidered in gold, her face covered by a mask and a leathern gauntlet on her hand ; a man dressed in black velvet who looked like Columbus or Copernicus, describing magic circles with a diamond-headed riding-whip, while from behind the platform, amid a sickening odour of stables and wild beasts, was heard the roar of the lions in Garel's menagerie. All these living curiosities mingled in one confused mass with the painted images, giantesses in ball dress, bare necks, and fat, pink, pillow-like arms displayed from the short sleeves down to the tightly-buttoned gloves ; figures of somnambulists, seated, with bandaged eyes looking into futurity, by the side of some black-haired doctor ; monsters, prodigies, every kind of eccentricity and phenomenon, often sheltered only by two large sheets fastened up by a cord, with the money-box placed on a chair ready for the spectator's coin.

And everywhere, at every turn was seen the king of the fair : gingerbread under all aspects and


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shapes, in shops draped with red, fringed with gold, wrapped up in shiny picture-paper, tied up with ribbons, ornamented with sugar-plums and burnt almonds ; gingerbread flattened and grotesquely shaped like men, representing the Parisian notorieties ; Amanda's lover, Prince Queue de Poule and his inseparable companion Rigolo ; gingerbread hawked about in baskets, sold on deal planks, spreading a good odour of honey and cooked fruit through the tightly packed crowd, which was becoming too dense for circulation.

It was now impossible for the royal party to retrace their steps. They were obliged to follow the despotic current, to advance or retire, unconsciously pushed first towards one booth, then towards another, for the living stream pressed together in the middle of the fair, seeks to overflow on all sides, without finding any issue. Laughs and jokes burst forth in this continuous and compulsory elbowing. Never before has the queen come so closely in contact with the people. Touched almost by their breath and the rough proximity of their powerful shoulders, she is astonished at feeling neither disgust nor terror, and advances with the others, with that hesitating step all crowds have, which resembles the hushed awe of a procession, and retains, even in the absence of vehicles, a kind of solemnity.

The good temper of these folk, the exuberant

gaiety of her son, and the quantity of perambulators in the thickest of the crowd, all tends to reassure her. "Don't push there. Don't you see there's a child." Not one, but ten, twenty, hundreds of children, carried in arms by their mothers, or on their father's shoulders; and Frédérique exchanges a smile, when she sees a child of the people of the same age as her own son.

Elysée, however, begins to feel uneasy. He knows what a crowd is, however calm in appearance, and the danger of its sudden movements. If one of those threatening clouds should burst into rain, what disorder and panic would ensue! His imagination, ever on the alert, conjures up the scene: the horrible stifling, the terrible death-struggle on the Place Louis XV., the sinister crowding together of a whole people in the midst of a gigantic Paris, within a stone's-throw of immense, deserted, but inaccessible avenues.

Between his mother and his tutor, who help and protect him, the little prince gets very hot. He complains that he cannot see anything. Then, like the workmen who surround them, Elysée places Zara on his shoulders, and the child bursts into fresh exclamations of delight, for the sight from up there is really splendid. Against a background of setting sun, streaked with light and floating shadows, on the long perspective before

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them, between the two columns of the barrier, stands out a waving mass of flags and streamers, while the canvas flaps in front of the booths. The light wheels of the gigantic swings raise one by one their little cars full of people ; an immense merry-go-round, three-storied, varnished and coloured like a plaything, turns mechanically with its lions, leopards, and fantastic creatures, upon which the children sit as stiff as little wooden puppets. Near at hand clusters of red balloons fly through the air ; innumerable twirlings of yellow-paper mills look like artificial suns, and above the crowd rise a quantity of little staring eyes and fair-haired heads, just like Zara's. The pale rays of the setting sun illumine the clouds, and lend them metallic hues, lighting up or darkening all things by their reflection, and this gives additional movement to the scene. Here they touch up a clown and a columbine, two white patches frisking about opposite each other, like a pantomime in white chalk on the background of a black-board ; yonder, a lanky mountebank, his head surmounted by a Phrygian shepherd's pointed cap, bends forward, with a gesture as though shoving dough into an oven, and pretends to push into his booth the black stream of people coming up his steps. The mountebank has his mouth open, he must be speaking, roaring indeed, but it is impossible to hear him, any more than the sound of a bell furiously

shaken at the corner of a platform over there, or the firing of an arquebus, from which a puff of smoke is seen issuing. Every sound is drowned in the immense uproar of the fair, a clamour made up of every kind of discordant noise: rattles, reed-pipes, gongs, drums, speaking-trumpets, the roar of wild beasts, hurdy-gurdies, and the whistles of engines. There is a general struggle to attract the crowd—as bees are attracted by noise—and the most indefatigable, the most deafening instruments are set going; from the swings and whirligigs sharp cries are also heard, while every ten minutes the trains of the circular line pass on a level with the fair, break in and overpower by their whistle the maddening uproar.

All at once, the fatigue and suffocating smell of that human crowd, the dazzling glare of an afternoon sun, slanting and hot, in which so many bright things are turning and twisting, make the queen turn giddy and feel faint.

She has but time to seize hold of Elysée's arm in order not to fall, and while she leans clingingly on him, pale though erect, she murmurs in a low voice: "It is nothing—nothing." But her head, in which all the nerves throb painfully; her body, which loses all consciousness of existence, for a moment abandons itself. Elysée will never forget that moment.

It is over. Frédérique is herself again. A

breath of fresh air on her brow has quickly revived her, but she does not let go of the protecting arm ; and that queen's step, measured on his own, the pressure of that warm gloved hand, produce in Elysée an inexpressible emotion. Danger, the crowd, Paris, the fête, he forgets everything. He is in the magic world where dreams become realities with all their extravagant fancies. Lost in the plebeian crowd, he walks on without hearing it, without seeing it, borne along by a cloud that envelops him, pushes, carries him onward and insensibly brings him out of the avenue. There only does he return to earth and reality. The queen's carriage is far. It is impossible to find it. They are compelled to return on foot to the Rue Herbillon, to follow in the fading daylight the long avenues, the streets lined with wine-shops, full of half tipsy passers-by. It is quite an adventure, but none of them think of the strangeness of their return home. Little Zara talks, rattling on as children do after a treat, eager to relate all the sights, ideas, and events their eyes have beheld. Elysée and the queen are silent. He, quivering still, recalls, and at the same time endeavours to forget, the exquisite and penetrating moment which has revealed to him the secret, the sad secret of his life. Frédérique dwells upon all she has just seen and heard that was new to her. For the first time she has felt the throbs of the people's heart, she

has laid her head upon the lion's shoulder. It has left her an impression of powerful sweetness, like a tender and protecting embrace.





VIII.

THE GRAND STROKE.

THE door, slammed to sharply and autocratically, wafted through the Agency a breath of air that fluttered the blue veils and waterproofs, and waved the invoices in the hands of the clerks, and the feathers in the ladies' hats. Hands were stretched out and heads bowed. J. Tom Levis had just entered the hall. A circular smile, two or three orders briefly given to the accountant, and

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the question asked in a singularly triumphant tone as to whether the parcel had been sent to H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, and he disappeared rapidly into his private office, the clerks signalling to one another by winks that the master was in an extraordinary good humour. Something certainly must be up. Even the calm Sephora behind her grating thought so, and softly inquired as she saw Tom come in :

“ What is going on ? ”

“ Such things ! ” said the other with the wide silent laugh, and the peculiar whirl of eyes habitual to him on great occasions.

He beckoned to his wife to follow him.

They went down the fifteen narrow steps, edged with copper, that led to a little boudoir underground, very tastily furnished with a divan, a dressing-table, and lighted by gas ; the little cellar window, that opened on the Rue Royale, being closed by ground-glass as thick as a piece of horn. From this room they could communicate with the cellars and the yards, thus allowing Tom to come and go without being seen, to avoid intruders and creditors, those whom in Parisian slang are called the “ *pavés*, ” that is to say, people or things that block the circulation. With such complicated affairs as those the Agency dealt in, these Red Indian subterfuges were indispensable. Otherwise life would have been spent in quarrels and wrangling.

The oldest clerks in Tom’s office, men who had



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been in his employ for five or six months, had never been down into this mysterious basement room, where Sephora alone had right of entry. It was the agent's private nook, his very self, his conscience, the cocoon from which he issued each time a transformed being ; something like the dressing-room of an actor, which at the present moment, indeed, it greatly resembled, with its gas burners lighting up the marble, the flounced trimmings of the toilet-table, and the strange pantomime that J. Tom Levis, agent for foreigners, was just then performing. In a trice he opened his long English frockcoat and flung it far away, then he tore off one waistcoat, then another, the many-coloured waistcoats of the circus-rider, unwound the ten yards of white muslin that constituted his cravat, the numberless bands of flannel superposed round his waist, and from the majestic and apoplectic rotundity which rushed all over Paris in the first, the only cab known in those days, there suddenly stood revealed, with an "ouf" of relief, a little dried-up, wiry man, no bigger than an empty reel, a frightful quinquagenarian street-arab, who looked as though he had been saved from a fire, drawn from a lime-kiln, with all the wrinkles, scars, and devastating ravages of scalding ; and notwithstanding all this, an indescribable appearance of youth, the mischievous look of a *mobile* of '48,*

A volunteer corps chiefly composed of Parisian youths.

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the real Tom Levis, no other than Narcisse Poitou, the son of a joiner of the Rue d'Orillon.

After having grown up to the age of ten amid the shavings at the side of the paternal work-bench, and from ten to fifteen received his education in the national school and in the street—that marvellous school of outdoor life, Narcisse had soon felt within him a horror for the populace, and for all manual labour, and, at the same time, became conscious that he was gifted with an all-devouring imagination and an experience which the Parisian gutter and all the nameless things it sweeps along had stocked far more thoroughly than a long voyage could have done. As a child he already planned schemes and projects. Later on his ever-roving imagination prevented his directing his powers towards one settled object, and they remained unproductive. He travelled, began a thousand different trades ; a miner in Australia, a squatter in America, an actor in Batavia, a bailiff in Brussels ; after having made debts in the two hemispheres, left creditors at the four corners of the earth, he settled down as agent in London, where he lived for a considerable time, and where he might have succeeded if the terrible insatiability of his imagination, ever in quest of something fresh, the imagination of a voluptuary ever forestalling the coming pleasure, had not thrown him back into the deepest and darkest poverty. This time he fell very low, and was picked up one night

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in Hyde Park as he was trying to steal the swans off the Serpentine. A few months of prison life thoroughly disgusted him with the "land of the free," and he returned like a waif, stranded on the Parisian pavement, whence he had taken his departure.

It was also a whimsical fancy, added to his instincts of actor and mountebank, that had made him dub himself an Englishman, a thing easy enough for him with his knowledge of the manners, language, and ways of the Anglo-Saxons. It was instinctive, a sudden inspiration on the occasion of his first stroke of business, his first "grand stroke."

"Who shall I announce?" had inquired insolently a tall flunky in livery, when he presented himself on this memorable occasion, and Poitou, seeing himself so threadbare, so wretched in the vast ante-room, fearing lest he should be turned away before he was listened to, feeling the imperative necessity of rising above the situation by something abnormal and foreign, had answered:

"Oh! announce Mr. Tom Levis!"

And he at once felt so imbued with confidence under this name, improvised at a minute's notice, and this borrowed nationality, that he took a delight in affecting the peculiarities and manias belonging to it, carefully watching over his accent and manners, correcting his exuberant fancy, and allowing himself time by a hesitation of speech to invent the necessary lies.

Strange as it may seem, of all the innumerable combinations of this inventive brain, this one, that he had the least sought for, was the most successful. To it he owed the acquaintance of Sephora, who at that time kept in the Champs Elysées a kind of "*Family Hotel*," a pretty three-storied house, with pink curtains and a little flight of stone steps on the Avenue d'Antin, bordered on each side by wide asphalt side-walks, enlivened by trees and flowers. The mistress of the establishment, always neatly attired, displayed her calm seraphic profile at one of the windows on the ground floor, bent over some needlework or ledger. The customers were a strange exotic medley : clowns, bookmakers, circus-riders, horse-dealers, and Anglo-American riff-raff, the worst of all, scum of the gold-fields and gambling houses. The feminine side was recruited from the quadrilles at Mabilles, the violins of which might be heard on summer evenings, mingling with the noisy brawls of the "*family*" and the clatter of counters and gold pieces, for play ran high after dinner. If perchance some respectable family of foreigners, deceived by the appearance of the place, came to settle at Sephora's, the strange look of the guests, the tone of the conversation, drove them away in dismay, their boxes half unpacked, on the very first day.

In the midst of these adventurers and swindlers Monsieur Poitou, or rather Tom Levis, the

insignificant occupier of an attic-room, soon acquired an important position by his gaiety, his suppleness, his knowledge of business, of all kinds of business. He invested the servants' savings, and through them gained the confidence of their mistress. How could it be otherwise, with his smiling good-natured frank countenance, with the indefatigable high spirits that made him the most valued guest at the table d'hôte, attracting the customers, exciting expense, the life and soul of the betting and drinking parties. The fair hostess, so cold and reserved with everyone else, was free and unrestrained only with Tom. Often in the afternoon, coming in or going out, he would stop at the little office of the hotel, clean and bright with mirrors and matting. Sephora would relate her affairs, show him her jewels and her ledgers, consult him on the bill of fare, or the care she must bestow on a large arum lily placed by her side in a vase of Minton's earthenware. Together they laughed over the love-letters and proposals of all kinds she received, for she was a woman untouched by sentiment. Of an icy temperament, she kept at all times and under all circumstances an imperturbably cool head, and treated all love affairs in a business-like manner. It is said that a woman's first lover gives the impress to her whole life; Sephora's lover, a sexagenarian chosen by father Leemans, had frozen her blood and perverted her love. This beautiful creature, born in an old

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curiosity shop, treated everything from a monetary point of view, to which she added the intrigue, cheating, and low cunning acquired by bartering. Little by little a bond was formed between her and Tom, the kind of affection that springs up between guardian and ward. He advised her, guided her, and always with a skill, a fecundity of imagination that charmed her methodical quiet nature, in which Jewish fatalism mingled with the heavy temperament of Flanders. Never did she invent or imagine anything, living only in the present. Tom's fertile brain, his perpetual firework of ready wit therefore completely dazzled her. What put the finishing touch to her conquest was hearing her boarder, one evening after he had been talking the most comical gibberish all dinner-time, whisper in her ear as he took his key from the office :

“ You know, I am no more English than you are ! ”

From that day she loved him, or rather—for sentiments are known only by their label—she became infatuated with him, like a lady is sometimes infatuated with an actor whom she alone knows as he is away from the footlights, the rouge, and the theatrical get-up ; such as he is, and not such as he appears to others ; love ever craves for these privileges. Moreover they both came from the same Parisian gutter. In the same gutter that had soiled the edge of Sephora's skirts Narcisse had also wallowed ; and they both retained alike

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the taint and the love of the mire whence they sprang. 'The low stamp, the vicious instincts that would step in at times and raise the mask of the would-be Englishman, are also displayed in the brief flashes that cross Sephora's biblical features, in the irony and the vulgar laugh of her Jewish mouth.

This strange love of Beauty and the Beast increased in proportion as the woman penetrated more thoroughly into the nature of this mountebank, into the confidence of his tricks, of his apishness ; from the invention of the cab down to the numerous waistcoats, by the help of which J. Tom Levis, not being able to add to his stature, strove at least to look imposing ; in proportion as she associated with this existence, full of surprises and adventures, schemes, dreams, and great and little strokes of fortune. And this apish fellow was so clever, that after ten years of a legitimate and commonplace union, he could still amuse her, charm her, as on the first day they had met. It would have been sufficient to remove all doubt on the subject to have seen her that day, lying back on the divan of the little boudoir, writhing and convulsed with laughter, as she repeated in an ecstasy of delight : "What a ridiculous creature you are !" while Tom, in coloured vest and drawers, reduced to his simplest expression, bald, angular, and bony, danced in front of her a frantic jig, to an accompaniment of spasmodic gestures

and mad stamping. When they were both tired, she of laughing and he of jumping, he threw himself down by her side on the sofa, drew his monkeyish head close to her angelic face, and breathed his joy into her ear.

“The Sprichts are squashed !  
Down with them all ! I have hit  
upon my stroke, my grand stroke.”

“Quite sure ?  
Who is it ?”

The name he uttered brought to Sephora’s lips a pretty disdainful pout.

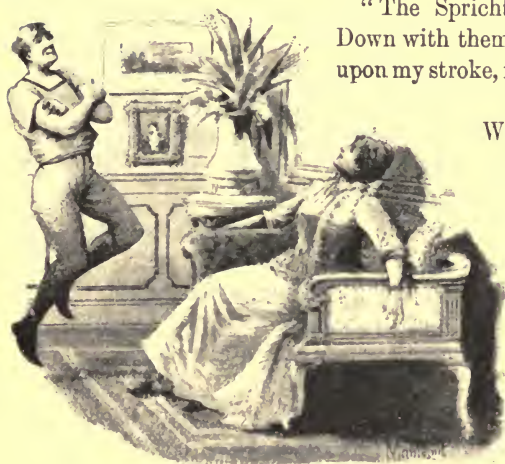
“What ! that  
great goose ?  
But he has not  
got a penny.  
We have

sheared him and his Illyrian lion. He has not a scrap of wool left on his back.”

“Don’t make fun of the lion of Illyria, my dear,” said Tom, resuming his habitual seriousness. “His skin alone is worth eight millions sterling.” The woman’s eyes flashed ! He repeated, emphasizing each syllable :

“Eight millions sterling !”

Then coldly, clearly, he explained what he





meant. The question was to bring Christian II. to accept the proposition of the Diet, and abandon his rights to the throne for the handsome sum offered to him. After all what was it? merely a signature, nothing more. Christian left to himself would have made up his mind long ago. It was his surroundings, more especially the Queen, that stopped him, and prevented his signing this renunciation. Nevertheless he would have to come to that one day or another. They had not a farthing left in the house. They owed to all the tradespeople of Saint-Mandé, to the butchers, to the forage-dealer—for notwithstanding the poverty of the masters, there were still horses in the stables. The establishment was well kept, the table well supplied, all the appearance of luxury concealing sinister privations. The royal linen, embroidered with the crown, lay full of holes in the press, and could not be renewed. The coach-houses were empty, the largest pieces of plate pawned, the servants left hardly sufficed for the work, and their wages often remained several months unpaid. Tom had all these details from Lebeau, the valet, who had at the same time told him the story of the eight millions proposed by the Diet of Leybach and the scene this offer had given rise to.

Since the King knew that eight millions lay there, within reach of his hand, ready to be exchanged for a penful of ink, he was a changed man; he no longer laughed, nor talked, keeping

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this set idea in his head, like a neuralgic spot aching in one side of his brow. He kept sighing heavily all day, and his temper was that of a surly dog. Nothing however had been changed in his own particular service : he still had secretary, valet, coachman and lacqueys ; the same luxurious and costly furniture and dress. Frédérique, in her desperate pride, strove to conceal their distress by dint of haughtiness, and never would allow the King to lack anything. When perchance he dined at the Rue Herbillon, she insisted on the table being royally provided for. One thing, however, she could not supply : that was pocket-money for his expenses at the club, gambling and women. Evidently the King would be overcome by that. Some fine morning, after a long night passed at baccarat or bouillote, unable to pay and unwilling to owe—imagine Christian of Illyria posted up at the club !—he must take up a pen and sign his abdication.

The thing would in fact have already taken place, had it not been for old Rosen, who, secretly, notwithstanding Frédérique's order, had again begun to advance money to His Majesty. The plan was therefore to lead him into fresh expenses, to make him contract such extravagant debts and numberless liabilities as would be beyond the resources of the old duke. This required a considerable amount of money to be laid out.

“ But,” said Tom Levis, “ the thing is so safe that

we are certain of finding the necessary funds. The best plan would be to speak of it to father Leemans, and keep the job in the family. The only thing I am anxious about is the main-spring—the woman ! ”

“ What woman ? ” asked Sephora, opening wide her ingenuous eyes.

“ The woman who will undertake to put the noose round the king’s neck. We must have a spendthrift of the first class, a minx who will take up the thing seriously, with the digestion of an ostrich, and who won’t stick at a large mouthful.”

“ Amy Férat, perhaps ? ”

“ No go ! used up ! utterly used up, and besides not greedy enough. She will sing, sup, kick up a row like any young fool. But she is not the woman to swallow up a quiet little million (forty thousand pounds) a month, without having seemed to put a tooth into it ; to hold the prize high, dispute every detail, every square inch, and sell it all dearer than a building lot in the Rue de la Paix.”

“ Oh ! I feel exactly how the thing should be done,” said Sephora thoughtfully, “ but who is to do it ? ”

“ Ah ! indeed who ? ”

And the laugh that passed between them was equal to a deed of partnership.

“ Come ! since you have begun ! ”

“ What ! you know ? ”

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“Do you suppose I don’t see his little game when he gazes at you, and his dawdling by the wicket when he thinks I am out? Besides, he makes no mystery about it, and tells the story of his love to anyone who will listen. He has even written and put his name to it on the club book.”

On learning the history of the bet, the tranquil Sephora betrayed some emotion.

“Ah, indeed! Two thousand napoleons that he would be my lover. Well, that is coming it rather too strong.”

She rose, took a few steps to shake off her anger, and then coming back to her husband’s side :

“You know, Tom, for the last three months I have had that great simpleton hanging round my chair. Well, look, not so much as that—”

Here might be heard the smart crack of a dainty finger-nail against a tooth that asked nothing better than to bite.

She was telling the truth. Notwithstanding the months that had elapsed since the king had first given chase, he was still fain to be content with touching the tips of her fingers, biting the penholders she had used, intoxicating himself with the mere brush of her skirts in passing. Never had such a thing happened before to this Prince Charming, spoilt as he was by the women, assailed on all sides by luring smiles and perfumed billets-doux. His handsome curly head which seemed to bear

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the impress of a crown, the heroic legend cleverly spread by the queen, and, above all, the indescribable seduction that seems to surround those who are loved already, had procured for him unmistakable success among the ladies of the noble faubourg. More than one of these could have shown, curled up on a corner of the sofa of her aristocratic boudoir, a marmoset from the royal cage, and in the theatrical world, almost always of a royalist and conservative turn of mind, it gave at once a position to an actress to be able to show in her album a portrait of Christian II.

This man, accustomed to find eyes, lips and hearts fly towards him, never to throw a glance without meeting a quivering response, had wasted his time for months before this cold and tranquil woman. She played the part of the model book-keeper, added up columns, turned over the heavy pages, and offered to her sighing wooer nothing but a view of the velvety roundness of her cheek, and the shadow of a smile at the corners of her lips and eyes. The caprice of the Slave had at first been amused by this struggle, then his self-conceit was aroused, the eyes of the whole Grand-Club being riveted upon him; and finally it ended in a real passion, fed by the emptiness of the unoccupied life which permitted the flame to rise straight and high without encountering any obstacle. He came every day at five o'clock, the best moment of the Parisian day, the hour of visits, when the amuse-

ment of the evening is decided upon ; and little by little all the younger members of the club, who lunched at the agency and hovered round Séphora, respectfully made way for him. This desertion, diminishing as it did the figure of the small running accounts, increased the lady's coldness, and as the lion of Illyria brought in nothing, she was beginning to make Christian feel that he was in the way, that he took possession too royally of the half opened angle of her wicket, when suddenly all was changed, and the change took place on the very day after her conversation with Tom.

“Your majesty was seen last night at the *Fantaisies*.”

At this remark, underlined by a sad and anxious glance, Christian II. felt a delightful thrill of emotion.

“Yes,” he said, “I was there.”

“Not alone ?”

“No, but——”

“Ah ! some women are very fortunate.”

To lessen the provocation of her remark she hastened to add that for a long time she had had a great wish to go to this little theatre to see that Swedish dancer, you know, “But that her husband never took her anywhere.”

The king proposed to escort her.

“Oh ! you are too well known.”

“But if I kept well at the back of a pit-box ?” said the king.

In short, an appointment was arranged for the next evening, since, as luck would have it, Tom would then be out.

What a delightful escapade. She in front of the box, in a discreet and becoming gown, expanded into childish joy at the sight of the foreigner who had her little hour of celebrity in Paris—a Swede, dressed all in black, with thin face and angular gestures, while from under her fair locks gleamed brilliant black eyes, all iris, eating up the whole face, and in her bounds and noiseless springs lurked the wild affright of a startled bat.

“Oh! what fun! how delightful!” kept repeating Séphora.

The king sitting motionless behind her, a box of sweets on his knee, could not recall a more delicious sensation than that caused by the bare arm under its laces that brushed against his, while the fresh mouth was turned towards him. He insisted upon escorting her to the Saint-Lazare railway station, for she was to return to the



country, and in the carriage, in a moment of transport, he impulsively drew her within his arms.

“Oh,” said she, sadly, “you will spoil all my pleasure.”

The immense waiting-room on the first floor was deserted and badly lighted. Seated together on a bench Séphora, shivering, sheltered herself in Christian’s ample fur cloak. Here she was no longer afraid, and letting herself go, talked unreservedly to the king in low, tender whispers. From time to time some railway official would pass by, swinging a lantern, or some group of actors living in the suburbs, going home after the play. Amongst them, a couple, closely linked, walked together with an air of pleasurable mystery.

“How happy they are !” murmured she. “No ties, no duties. Able to follow the promptings of their own hearts. All the rest is a delusion and a snare.”

Alas ! she knew something of this. And suddenly, as though carried away by an irresistible impulse, she described to him her sad life with a candour that touched him : the snares, the temptations of the Paris streets for a girl kept poor by the avarice of her father ; then at sixteen, the sinister bargain, life at an end ; the four years passed by the side of that old man to whom she had been nothing but a sick nurse ; afterwards determined not to fall again into the trafficking clutches of old Leemans, the

necessity of finding some guide, some support, had induced her to marry this Tom Levis, a man who thought of nothing but money. She had given and devoted herself entirely to him, was deprived of all pleasure, buried alive in the country, and then set to this clerk's work, and all without a word of thanks, or recognition from this ambitious man, who, wholly wrapped up in his affairs at the faintest sign of revolt, at the least wish to see a little more life, crushed her mercilessly by flinging in her face her past, for which she was not responsible.

"That past," she said, rising, "to which I owe the outrageous insult signed with your name in the book of the Grand-Club."

The bell ringing for the start, put a stop exactly in the right place to this little theatrical effect. She glided away, the light folds of her black draperies following her undulating step, and with a parting salute from eyes and hand, left Christian motionless and stupefied, bewildered by what he had just heard. She knew then? How? Oh! how he



abused himself for his baseness, for his boastfulness. He spent the night in writing to ask pardon; his French strewn with all the flowers of his native poetry, in which the beloved was compared to the cooing turtle-dove, or the rosy-tinted fruit of the azarole.

This reproach aimed at the bet was a splendid idea of Séphora's. It gave her a lasting hold over the king. This too, was a sufficient explanation of her protracted coldness, her almost inimical reception of him, and the crafty bargaining she was about to make of her own person. Must not a man put up with anything and everything from a woman to whom he had offered such an insult?

Christian became the timid and obedient cavalier, subservient to all her caprices, the acknowledged lover in the sight of all Paris; and, if the lady's beauty served as his excuse in the eyes of the world, there was, on the other hand, nothing to be proud of in the friendship and familiarity of the husband. "My friend, Christian II.," Tom Levis used to say, drawing up his diminutive figure. The fancy once took him to receive the king at Courbevoie, just to give Spricht one of those fits of jealous rage that must shorten the great tailor's days. The king was shown through the house and park, went on board the yacht, allowed himself to be photographed on the doorsteps, between his hosts, who wished to immortalize the memory of this never-to-be-forgotten day; and in the evening,

while a shower of fireworks was let off, and reflected in the Seine as they fell, Séphora, leaning on Christian's arm, murmured in his ear as they skirted the trim beech groves, all white with the Bengal lights :

“ Ah ! how I could love you, if you were not a king ! ”

It was a first confession, and a very adroit one. Every mistress he had ever had until now, had adored in him the sovereign, the glorious title, the long line of ancestors. This one loved him for himself alone. “ If you were not a king.” And he was so little a king, he would willingly have sacrificed to her the shred of dynastic purple that barely clung to his shoulders.

Another time she explained herself yet more clearly. When he expressed uneasiness at finding her pale and tearful. “ I am afraid that soon we shall meet no longer,” she replied.

“ And why ? ”

“ He has just told me that business was too bad in France, and that we must shut up shop here, and start for some other country.”

“ What ! Take you away ? ”

“ Oh ! I am only an obstacle to his ambition. He said to me : ‘ Come if you like.’ But I must follow him. What would become of me all alone here ? ”

“ Oh ! naughty one. Am I not here ? ”

She looked at him fixedly, straight in the eyes.

“ Yes, it is true, you love me, and I too love you.

Would to God I could be yours without shame. But no, it is impossible."

"Impossible?" he asked, breathless at the glimpse of paradise.

"You are too far above Séphora Levis, Monseigneur."

To which he replied, with delightful fatuity :

"I will raise you to my level. I will make you a countess, a duchess. It is one of the privileges that still remain to me ; and we can easily find somewhere in Paris a lover's nest, where I can establish you in a manner worthy of your rank, where we will live all alone ; no one between us."

"Oh ! it would be too much happiness."

She seemed lost in a dream, then raising her childish, candid eyes, in which the hushed tears glittered, said, abruptly :

"No, no, you are king. One day, in the midst of happiness, you would leave me."

"Never !"

"But if they recalled you ?"

"Where ? To Illyria ? That is all at an end, broken off for good and all. Last year I missed one of those chances that never come again."

"Really ?" said she, with a joy that was not assumed. "Oh, if I were sure of that !"

To convince her, a word hovered on his lips, which he did not pronounce, but which she, nevertheless, understood ; and in the evening, J. Tom Levis, duly informed by Séphora of all that had

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passed, solemnly declared that "the moment had come ; the old man must be spoken to at once."

Allured, like his daughter, by the imagination, the infectious, go-ahead spirit, the inventive jabber of Tom Levis, Leemans had several times put money into the agency speculations. After having gained, he had lost, following in that the hazard of play ; but when he had been "done," as he expressed it, two or three times, the good man drew the line. He did not recriminate, did not get into a rage, being too well versed in the chances of business and hating useless words ; only, when his son-in-law began to talk to him about advancing money for one of those marvellous castles in the air that his eloquence could raise as high as the skies, the dealer smiled gently in his beard, in a significant manner that meant quite clearly, "No go ; no more of that," with a sudden lowering of the eyelids that seemed to bring back to reason, to the level of possibility, all Tom's extravagant ideas.

The other knew this ; and as he had wisely resolved that the Illyrian affair should not go out of the family, he despatched Séphora to interview the dealer, who in his old age developed a sort of affection for his only child, in whom indeed he recognised a second self.

Since the death of his wife, Leemans had given up his curiosity shop in the Rue de la Paix, and contented himself with his den in the Rue Eginhard. Here Séphora repaired one morning early,

in order to be sure of finding him, for the old man remained but little at home. Immensely rich and ostensibly retired from business, he continued to grope and ferret about Paris from morning till night, following the sales, seeking the atmosphere, the stir of business, and above all overlooking with marvellous acuteness the host of little dealers, picture and curio sellers, in whose business he was a sleeping partner, without owning it, lest anyone should suspect his wealth.

Séphora in a moment of caprice, a reminiscence of her youth, came on foot to the Rue Eginhard from the Rue Royale, following very nearly the same road by which she used formerly to return from the shop. It was not yet eight o'clock. The air was keen, there were few vehicles about, and in the direction of the Bastille there lingered a relic of the dawn, an orange mist, in which the gilt figure of the column seemed to dip its wings. On this side, from all the adjoining streets, issued forth a charming population, all the girls of the faubourg going to their work. If the Prince d'Axel could have got up early enough to see this crowd, he would have been well satisfied this morning. In twos and threes, alert and talking as they walked quickly along, they were going to the crowded workshops of the Rues Saint-Martin, Saint-Denis, Vieille-du-Temple, while a few, more elegant than the others, were bound for the shops on the boulevards further off, but opening later.

It was not the animation of the evening, when, the daily task finished, their heads full of the



exciting Paris atmosphere, they return homewards, with noisy laughter, and may be some wistful regret of the luxury they have witnessed, which made the garret seem higher perched, and the staircase

steeper and more dark. But if some sleep still hung about their youthful eyes, repose had adorned them with a sort of freshness, completed by the neatly dressed hair, the knot of ribbon tied round the neck, and the careful brushing given before starting to the black frocks. Here and there a sham jewel glittered in a little ear pink from the cold, a comb gleamed in the plaits, a buckle sparkled at the waist, or a folded newspaper peeped out of the pocket of a waterproof. And what hurry, what courage was there! Thin cloaks, thinner petticoats, the steps tottering on heels far too high, and trodden away through much usage. In one and all was coquetry innate, not one but had a way of walking along with head erect, eyes never at rest, full of curiosity as to what the day might bring; natures ever ready for what chance might offer, just as their Parisian type—which is no type at all—is open to any sort of transformation.

Séphora was not sentimental, and never saw anything beyond the thing and the moment present; yet this confused tramping, this hurried rustling and bustling around her, amused her. On all these girlish faces, in this morning sky, in the quaint, old quarter, where each street at its corner bore on a framed placard the names of the chief shops, and where nothing had changed for fifteen years, she saw her own youth. Passing beneath the black archway that serves as entry to the Rue Eginhard,



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on the side of the Rue Saint-Paul, she caught sight of the long robe of the Rabbi wending his way to the neighbouring synagogue; two steps further, she met the rat-killer with his pole and board, from which hung the hairy corpses of many rats, a type of old Paris that is only to be found now amid these mouldy dwellings, in whose walls all the rats in Paris hold their resort; further still, a cabman whom, every morning of her shop-girl's life, she had seen going off thus to his work, moving heavily in his big boots, little fitted for walking, and holding carefully in his hand, upright as a communicant's taper, the whip, which is to the coachman as the sword is to the soldier, an insignia of his rank, and which never leaves him. At the door of the two or three shops that compose the whole street, and from which the shutters were being taken down, she saw the same old rags hanging in masses, heard the same gibberish of mixed Hebrew and German, and when, after passing through the low porch of the paternal house, and the little yard with the four steps leading up to the bric-à-brac shop, she pulled the string of the



cracked and wheezy bell, it seemed to her that fifteen years were lifted off her shoulders, fifteen years that had not, however, weighed heavily upon her.

Just as in those days, Darnet came to open the door ; she was a robust Auvergnate, with a ruddy, shiny colour on her dark complexioned face, who, with her spotted shawl tightly tied behind the waist, and black cap edged with white, seemed to be in mourning for some imaginary coalheaver. Her *rôle* in the house was evident, if only from the way she opened the door to Séphora, and from the sour and frosty smile that the two women exchanged as they stood face to face.

“ My father is at home ? ”

“ Yes, Madame, in the workshop. I will call him.”

“ Needless. I know where it is.”

She crossed the ante-room and parlour, took three steps across the garden—a black hole between high walls, in which a few stunted trees vegetated skywards,—encumbered in all its narrow paths by countless odds and ends, old ironwork, leadwork, wrought-iron railings, the great chains of which oxidized and blackened metal matched well with the melancholy box-trees and the greenish hue of the old fountain. On one side was a shed overflowing with rubbish, the carcasses of broken furniture of all times and sorts, heaps of tapestry rolled up in every corner ; on the other side, a

workshop roofed with ground-glass panes to escape prying glances from neighbouring windows. In here, in apparent disorder, an assemblage of riches was piled to the ceiling, their worth only known to the old man himself ; lanterns, lustres, old torch-stands, panoplies, incense-burners, antique or foreign bronzes. At the further end were two forges and a joiner's and locksmith's bench. It was here that the old dealer mended, copied, and rejuvenated old pieces with marvellous skill and the patience of a Benedictine. Formerly the noise was continuous from morning to night, and five or six workmen surrounded the master ;



now all that could be heard was the click of a hammer upon the metal, the scratching of a file, all lighted up in the evening by a solitary lamp, just by way of proof that the old dealer was not dead.

When his daughter entered, old Leemans, a leathern apron in front of him, his shirt sleeves tucked up on red and hairy arms, so that they

looked as if they had been sprinkled with copper dust from the bench, was busy forging, at a vice, a candelabra in the style of Louis XIV., of which the model stood before him. At the noise of the door he raised his rubicund head, the features buried amid a beard and shock of light red hair, and knit his thick, shaggy eyebrows, whence his glance peered forth as if from under the falling locks of a rough terrier.

“Good morning, pa,” said Séphora, pretending not to see the embarrassed gesture of the old man who tried to conceal the candlestick he held; for he did not care to be disturbed or seen at work.

“So it is you, little one.”

He rubbed his old face against the delicate cheeks.

“What has happened?” he asked, pushing her towards the garden. “Why have you got up so early?”

“I have something very important to say to you.”

“Come in then.”

And he hurriedly led the way.

“Oh, but you know I don’t want Darnet to be present.”

“All right! All right!” said the old fellow, smiling from under his bushy brows, and as he went in he shouted to the busy servant, who was polishing up a Venetian mirror—for she was for ever rubbing and furbishing, even her own forehead, which was as shiny as a waxed floor:

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“Darnet, go into the garden and see if I am there.”

The tone in which this was said, proved that the old pasha had by no means abandoned his power to the favourite slave. The father and daughter remained alone in the neat, trim little parlour, where the furniture in its white covers, with little wool mats in front of every chair, contrasted oddly with the dusty wealth piled up in the workshop and shed. Like those first-class cooks who for their own part only relish the plainest food, father Leemans, such an expert in objects of art, did not possess in his own house the least vestige of anything of the kind, and in this stood confessed as the mere trader he was, calculating, exchanging, trafficking without passion or regret, not like those real lovers of curiosities, who before parting with some rarity, are concerned to know in what manner the buyer will set it off and display its beauty. In solitary grandeur on the walls, hung his full length portrait by Wattelet, representing him amid his ironwork, at his forge. It was as like him as ever : a little less grey, perhaps, but unchanged otherwise ; thin, bent, the doglike head with the flat, reddish, coarse beard and hair hanging long and rough over the forehead, leaving nothing of the features visible but a nose reddened by chronic inflammation, which gave to this tea-drinker's face the look of a drunkard's. Besides a mass-book laid on the mantel-piece, this picture was the only characteristic

note in the room. To this book Leemans owed some remunerative strokes of business; by it he distinguished himself from his rivals: from that old rascal Schwalbach, mother Esau, and others, with their Ghetto origin, while he was a Christian, married for love to a Jewess, but a Christian for all that—and a Catholic. This stood him in good stead with his best clients, he attended mass in the oratory of such ladies as the Comtesse Malet, or the eldest Sismondo, and showed himself on a Sunday at the fashionable churches of Saint-Thomas d'Aquin, or Sainte-Clotilde, which were frequented by his richest clients, while by means of his wife he kept in touch with all the great Israelitish financiers. As he grew older, this religious pretence became a habit, and often in the morning, before starting on his rounds, he would enter Saint-Paul's to get, as he said gravely, a tag end of mass, having noticed that he was always more lucky on those days.

“Well, what next?” he said, looking cunningly at his daughter.

“A big thing, pa.”

She drew from her bag a bundle of bills and drafts bearing Christian's signature.

“All this has to be discounted. Will you do it?”

At the mere sight of the writing, the old man made a grimace that puckered up his whole face, and made it almost disappear beneath the shock of

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surrounding hair, with the movement of a hedgehog on the defensive.

“Illyrian paper! Thanks, I know it. Your husband must be mad to send you on such an errand. Do you mean to tell me you have come to that?”

Without being put out at this greeting, which she had expected, she answered :

“Listen,” and with her sedate manner she related the affair to him in detail, with proofs in support of it, the number of the *Quernaro* in which was to be found the account of the sitting of the Diet, letters from Lebeau keeping them informed as to the situation. The king, desperately in love, was preoccupied with the sole care of settling his lady-love in a magnificent mansion, Avenue de Messine, with servants, horses and carriages—he wanted all this, and was ready to sign as many bills as necessary, at any rate of interest. Leemans now began to prick up his ears, he raised objections, examined and turned over all the details of the affair so skilfully prepared.

“When would the bills fall due?”

“In three months!”

“Then in three months?”

“Yes, in three months!”

She made a gesture as of tightening a running noose, compressing her cold lips at the same time.

“And the interest?”

“Whatever rate you please. The heavier the

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better. He must have no other option than to sign his abdication."

"And once signed?"

"The rest is the woman's business. She will have before her the owner of eight millions sterling to nibble at."

"And if she keeps it all for herself? We must be quite sure of the woman."

"We are sure of her."

"Who is it?"

"No one you know," replied Séphora without finching, putting back all the bundles of papers into her little hand-bag.

"Leave those papers here," said the old man sharply. "It's a lot of money, you know; a very large outlay. I must talk to Pichery about it."

"Take care, p'pa. We must not let in too many people. There is already Lebeau, and us, and you. If you let in many others——"

"Only Pichery. You see I am not rich enough to manage it all alone. It is a lot of money—a lot of money."

She replied coldly :

"Oh! we shall require a lot more before we have done."

There was a moment's silence. The old fellow reflected, concealing his thoughts behind his shaggy hair.

"Well, then!" he said at last; "I will do the business, but on one condition. That house,



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Avenue de Messine, it will have to be stylishly furnished? Well! I shall be entrusted with the furnishing of the works of art!"

Under the usurer, the dealer now asserted himself. Séphora burst into a laugh that displayed all her white teeth.

"Oh! you 'old clo'—'old clo,'" she cried, making use of the common street call suddenly brought back to her mind by her father's bartering, and which jarred with the distinction of her manners and dress. Well, that's agreed pa. You shall furnish the knick-knacks; but mind, nothing from mamma's collection if you please."

Under this hypocritical title, "Collection of the late Madame Leemans," the second-hand dealer had grouped together a lot of old, damaged, unsaleable things, which, thanks to this sentimental humbug, he sold at enormous prices, never consenting to part with a relic of his dear departed one, except for its weight in gold.

"You understood old man, no tricks, no rubbish, the lady knows what she is about."

"You think she really understands these things?" asked the old dog through his moustaches.

"As well as you and I, I assure you."

"Well, but——"

He put his rugged old face close to the fresh, pretty one; on both the greed of money was written; on the old dried parchment as well as on the delicate rose leaf

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“Well, but who is this woman? You can tell me now I am in the swim.”

“It is——”

She stopped for a moment, fastened the broad ribbon of her bonnet-strings under her dainty oval face, cast on the mirror the satisfied glance of a pretty woman, mingled with a new and sudden pride.

“It is the Comtesse de Spalato,” she said gravely.





## IX.

### A SITTING AT THE ACADEMIE.

THE classical palace that sleeps under the leaden roof of its cupola, at the end of the Pont des Arts, in the heart of scholarly Paris, had this morning an air of unusual life, and seemed in its animation to step forward on to the quay. Notwithstanding the rain, a pelting summer rain falling in heavy showers, a crowd was gathered together on the steps of the principal entrance, forming a trail along the iron railing and the Rue de Seine, a discreet, well-dressed crowd that waited patiently, knowing it would in time get in by means of the little cards of various colours which each one held in his hand. The carriages followed in the same regular file on the deserted Quai de la Monnaie, all that Paris contained in the way of stylish equipages, with magnificent and showy liveries,

powdered wigs and gold facings—democratically sheltered under umbrellas or waterproofs—exhibiting on their panels the arms of the greatest houses of France and Europe, even Royal mottoes; a moving and gigantic Peerage stretching out by the side of the Seine. When a ray of sun shone through the rain, a ray of the Parisian sun, which is like a gracious smile upon a serious face, the whole scene was lit up with a wet sheen; the harness, the caps of the police, the globe of the cupola, the cast-iron lions at the entrance usually dulled with dust, now beautifully polished black by the rain.

At long intervals, on solemn reception days, the old *Institut* suddenly springs into life for the space of a whole afternoon. But this morning there was no reception.

It was too late in the season, and the new members vain—like any actors—would never consent to a *debüt* after the Grand Prix had been run, the Salon closed, and trunks packed ready for departure. It was merely a distribution of academic prizes, a ceremony that had never much brilliancy, and which generally attracted only the families of the laureates. The reason of the exceptional and aristocratic affluence at the gates of the *Institut*, was that among the prize essays was the *Memorial of the Siege of Ragusa*, by the Prince de Rosen, and the royalist coterie had seized this occasion to make a sort of protestation against the established govern-

ment, under the protection of its own republican police. By an extraordinary stroke of good fortune, or perhaps by means of one of those intrigues that mysteriously sap the official and academic foundations, the perpetual secretary being ill, the report on the prize essays was to be read by the noble Duc de Fitz-Roy, and it was well known that this extreme legitimist would startlingly emphasize the most glowing passages of Herbert's volume, that grand historic pamphlet, which had brought together all the scattered devotion and fervour of the royalist party. In a word, it was to be one of the malicious protestations that the *Académie* dared even under the Empire, and which the easy good-nature of the Republic tolerated.

Mid-day. The twelve strokes struck by the old clock caused a murmur and a stir in the crowd. The doors opened. Slowly, methodically the crowd advanced towards the entrances of the Place and Rue Mazarine, while the emblazoned carriages turning in the Court deposited their masters—bearers of more favoured cards—under the portico, where amidst the ushers with their silver chains, the affable secretary in his silver-braided coat assiduously received them, smiling and eager like the worthy steward in the Palace of the Sleeping-Beauty, the day she awoke on her bed of state, after her sleep of one hundred years. The carriage doors slammed, the footmen in their long coats jumped from their

seats ; bows and curtseys are exchanged amid the smiles and whispering of habitual frequenters of the place, and are lost in the noise of the rustling silks as they disappear up the carpeted staircase that leads to the private boxes or in the narrow passage sloping downwards, as if bent with the weight of ages, that leads to the interior of the palace.

The amphitheatre is soon filled on the side set apart for the public. The benches rising in tiers one by one become black with people, till the last rows, standing up, appear in dark outlines against the glass dome above them. Not a single place is empty. It is a surging mass of heads lighted by a dim light like that of a church or a museum, chilled still more by the smooth yellow stucco of the walls, and the marble of the meditating statues ; Descartes, Bossuet, Massillon, all the glory of the "great century" congealed in motionless figures. In front of the overflowing semi-circle, a few unoccupied benches, a small green table with the traditional glass of water, await the Academicians and their officials, who will soon enter by the tall doors surmounted by the gilt sepulchral-looking inscription, "LETTERS, SCIENCES, ARTS." All this has a cold, shabby, old fashioned look, which contrasts with the fresh spring costumes that deck the hall. Soft light materials, dove-like greys, tender pinks, cut in the newest tight style, and spangled with jet and steel, bonnets that seem but

sprigs of mimosa mingled with lace, humming birds nestling in velvet knots and gold-coloured straw, and over all the regular, continual flutter of enormous fans, wafting delicate perfumes that made the "eagle of Meaux" (Bossuet) blink his eyes. Because they are the representatives of ancient France, there was no reason they should smell musty or be dressed like frights.

All that Paris contains of stylish, well-born, well-bred people is gathered together here; they are smiling to each other with little masonic signs; the flower of the clubs, the cream of the noble Faubourg, a somewhat exclusive society that does not usually mix with the common herd, is not seen on a first night at the play, only appears on certain days at the Opera or the Conservatoire; a discreet society, that tightly closes its many hanging curtains to keep out the light of day, and the noise of the street from its drawing-rooms; and is only spoken of from time to time, when a death or a scandalous separation takes place, or when one of its members—hero of the *Persil* \* and *la Gomme*—makes himself notorious by some eccentric adventure. In the midst of this choice set, may be seen a few noble Illyrian families, who have followed their prince into exile, fine specimens of men and

\* "*Persil*," slang term for the fashionable drive in the Bois-de-Boulogne.

women, perhaps a trifle too loud and exotic for this extremely refined society ; then grouped at certain conspicuous places are the frequenters of the Academic Salons, who long beforehand prepare the elections, count the votes, and whose acquaintance is by far more important to a candidate than his weight in genius. Illustrious but beggared Imperialists striving to creep in among these old partisans, upon whom they had formerly exhausted all the irony of parvenus ; then, select as is the company, a few women known for their princely liaisons have managed to slip in, dressed plainly and quietly it is true, and two or three fashionable actresses, faces known to all Paris, trivial and importunate visions, the more so, that other women, indeed, women of every class, tax their ingenuity to imitate them. And the journalists, reporters of foreign newspapers, armed with note-book and pencil, equipped as though for a journey to the centre of Africa.

Below, in the smaller reserved circle at the foot of the benches, the little Princesse Colette de Rosen the laureate's wife, attracts all eyes dressed in a lovely costume of blue-green Indian cashmere and watered silk, looking triumphant, and beaming under the fluffiness of her fair flaxen hair. Near her is a stout man with a vulgar face, old Uncle Sauvadon, very proud to accompany his niece, but who in his ignorant zeal and desire to do honour to



the solemnity of the ceremony, has come in a tail-coat. This makes him very unhappy ; embarrassed by his white tie as by a *cangue*, he anxiously watches the people coming in, hoping to find a fellow to his coat. There is none !

From the glitter of colour and the excited faces a buzzing sound of voices arises, rhythmical but distinct, that sends a magnetic current from one end of the hall to the other. The slightest laugh spreads, and is contagious ; the smallest sign, the mute gesture of two hands spread out ready to applaud is perceived from the top to the bottom of the benches. It is an artificial excitement, the friendly curiosity seen at a first representation when success is certain ; and from time to time as some celebrity comes in, an admiring or curious murmur from the assembly goes towards them, dying away only in their immediate vicinity.

Yonder, above Sully's statue, two women, accompanied by a child, have just entered, and have placed themselves in the front of the box. They are the queens of Illyria and of Palermo. The two cousins, proud and erect, dressed in the same mauve silk edged with antique embroidery, the same long, undulating feathers fastened round their diadem-shaped bonnets, the one over fair hair, the other over dark tresses, forming a charming contrast of two different noble types. Frédérique is paler, the sweetness of her smile is saddened by lines that age

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her ; and the face of her dark cousin also bears traces of the anxieties and worries caused by exile. Between them, the little Comte de Zara shakes the fair curls of his little head, each day held more vigorously erect, and in which both look and mouth have assumed more firmness. True royal seed beginning to bear flower.

The old Duc de Rosen occupies the back of the box with another personage—not Christian II., who has remained away to avoid too certain an ovation,—but a tall fellow with bushy mane, an unknown man, whose name, which ought to be in every mouth, will, however, not once be pronounced. It is in his honour that this *fête* is given ; it is he who has called forth this glorious *requiem* of monarchy, at which the last gentlemen of France and the royal families that have taken refuge in Paris are present ; for all the exiled, de-throned princes have come to do honour to their “cousin” Christian, and it has been no little matter to place these crowns according to etiquette. Nowhere are questions of precedence more difficult to settle than in exile, where vanity is on the watch, and susceptibilities rankle like old wounds.

In the Descartes tribune—all the tribunes bear the name of the statue placed under them—the King of Westphalia maintains a proud attitude, which the fixed stare of his eyes makes still more striking—eyes that look, but do not see. From

time to time he smiles in one direction, bows in another. His constant preoccupation is to conceal his incurable blindness ; and his daughter helps him in the task with unremitting devotion. She is a tall and slender girl ; her head seems to bend under the weight of the golden locks, the colour of which she has always hidden from her father. The blind king likes only dark hair : “ If you had been fair,” he says sometimes, stroking the princess’s hair, “ I think that I should have loved you less.” Admirable pair, treading with dignity the road of exile, as calmly and haughtily as though they were taking a walk through some royal park. In Queen Frédérique’s moments of discouragement she thinks of this infirm man guided by this innocent girl, and feels strengthened by the charm of purity that emanates from them.

Further on the eye catches sight of a scarlet satin turban ; it is the heavy Queen of Galicia, who, with her massive cheeks and high-coloured complexion, resembles a thick-skinned blood orange. She is in high spirits, puffs, fans herself, laughs and talks to a woman, still young, who wears a white mantilla, a woman of a kindly but melancholy physiognomy, with cheeks that are furrowed by the traces of constant weeping. This is the Duchess of Palma, an excellent creature, little fitted to bear the shocks and terrors constantly occasioned her by the adventuresome monarch of the highway,

with whose life she is linked. He, too, is there, restless dare-devil, and pokes familiarly between the two women his glossy black beard and conceited face, bronzed in his last expedition, as costly and as disastrous as the preceding ones. He has played the part of a king : had a court, *fêtes*, women, *Te Deums*, and triumphal entries strewn with flowers. He had pranced, decreed, danced, spilled ink and blood, burnt powder and sown hatred. And once the battle lost, the *suave-qui-peut* ordered, he has returned to France, seeking fresh recruits for his cause, more millions to squander, retaining even now the travelling buccaneer costume, the tight-fitting braided frock-coat that gives him the air of a Zingari. A whole set of noisy youths are talking loud in that box over there, with the impudent carelessness of a barbarian court, and their national tongue, harsh and guttural, flies from one to the other like hard iron balls, accompanied by a familiarity of words and manners, the secret of which is whispered through the hall.

It was a strange thing that, on a day when good seats were so rare, that princes of royal blood were glad to find places in the amphitheatre, one little box, the Bossuet tribune, should remain empty. Everybody wonders who is expected there, what great dignitary, what sovereign passing through Paris, is so long in making his appearance, and letting the sitting begin without him? Already

the old clock has struck one. A sharp word of command is heard outside : " Present arms ! " and amid the automatic clinking of the rifles, through the tall wide-opened doors: LETTERS, SCIENCES and ARTS make their appearance !

A remarkable peculiarity that distinguishes these illustrious beings, all alert and vivacious,—preserved, it would seem, by some principle, some traditional force of will—is that the oldest among them affect a juvenile gait, a frisky animation, while the younger do their best to appear solemn and serious in proportion as their hair is less grizzly. The general aspect is devoid of grandeur, the close-cut hair ordained by modern fashion, the black cloth and frock-coat of to-day destroying all prestige. Boileau's or Racan's wig must have had more authority, risen with more dignity under that high cupola. The picturesque part of the business is represented by two or three green palm-embroidered coats, who settle themselves behind the table and the glass of sugar and water ; and it is one of these who pronounces the time-honoured phrase : " Gentlemen, the sitting is opened." But in vain does he declare the sitting opened, no one believes him, nor does he believe it himself. He well knows that the real business of the sitting is not this report on the Montyon prizes, that one of the most discursive members of the assembly is about to give forth in mellifluous and well-modulated tones.

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It is indeed a model Academic discourse, written in true Academic style, with many "but still's," and "it might almost seem's," which at each moment force the mind to retrace its steps, like a devotee in the confessional, recalling her faults ; a style ornamented with arabesques and flourishes, like those of a writing-master running through the phrases in order to conceal their emptiness—a style, in short, which must be learned, and which everyone here present buckles on at the same time as the green-palmed coat. Under any other circumstances, the habitual public of the place would have gone into raptures over this homily ; and would have pawed the ground, neighed with delight at all the little tortuous phrases of which it would have divined the final point. To-day, however, everyone is in a hurry ; they had not come for this little literary treat. With what an air of contemptuous weariness this aristocratic assembly assists at the procession of humble self-devotion, of trusty fidelity, of hidden, jog-trot, bowed down existences, who wander through this obsolete, hesitating phraseology, as they have in reality passed their lives in narrow provincial corridors, dark, cold, and fireless, wherein they have concealed their self-sacrifice. Plebeian names, threadbare cassocks, old blue smocks, faded by sun and rain ; corners of distant villages showing for a brief moment their pointed steeple, low walls built up of cow-dung,—all these feel ashamed,

abashed, at having been conjured up from afar, into the midst of such a refined company, under the cold light of the Institut, as searching as that of a photographer's studio. The noble society is astonished there should be so many good folk among the lower classes. What more ! still more ? will they never cease suffering, sacrificing themselves, being heroic ? The clubmen declare this is an infernal bore. Colette de Rosen sniffs at her scent-bottle ; all these old people, these poor they are hearing about, smell of toil. Ennui is visible on every brow, oozes out from the very walls. The reader begins to understand that he is wearying everyone, and hurries on the humble nomenclature.

Ah ! poor Marie Chalaye of Ambérieux-les-Combes, you whom the people of the country call the Saint, who during fifty years have nursed your old paralytic aunt, and have brought up from infancy and provided for eighteen little cousins ; and you, worthy Abbé Bourillou, curate of Saint-Maximille-Haut, who used to go in the most bitter weather carrying consolation and help to the cheese-makers on the mountain-tops, you did not suppose that after having crowned your efforts by a public recognition, the Institut would feel shame and contempt for you, and that your names, hurried and muttered, would disappear unheard in the general inattention and hum of impatient or ironical conversations ! The end of the lecture was a positive rout. And

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as in order to speed his flight, the fugitive soldier throws aside his arms and knapsack, so the reader remorselessly tosses aside into the ditch, records of heroism and of angelic self-abnegation, knowing, moreover, that the papers of the morrow will reproduce his speech in full, and that not one of these delicately wrapped phrases will be lost to the public. At last he has reached the end. A few bravos, and "ah's" of relief greet him. The unfortunate man sits down, sponges his forehead, and receives the congratulations of two or three of his colleagues,—last vestals of the Academic style. Then there is a pause of five minutes, a general buzz in the hall, and, after stretching themselves, the listeners once more settle down.

All at once a great silence prevails. Another green coat has risen.

It is the noble Fitz-Roy, and everyone can admire him as he places his papers in order upon the little table. Thin, bent, wizen, with narrow shoulders and awkward gestures, caused by his long elbowy arms—he is only fifty and appears to be seventy. On this worn-out, badly-shaped body is a little head with distorted, pasty-looking features, between two thin whiskers and a few tufts of fluffy hair. He recalls Montefeltro in *Lucretia Borgia*, who, it will be remembered, drinks Pope Alexander's poison, and is seen passing at the back of the stage, shivering, broken-down, ashamed to live!



The noble Fitz-Roy might well represent that personage.

Not that he had ever drunk anything, poor man ! neither the Borgia's poison nor anything else ; but he is the heir of a terribly old family, that has never been crossed by a *mésalliance*, the off-shoot of a plant that has exhausted its sap, and which it is too late to revive.

The green of his coat makes him look still more livid, accentuates the outline of sick chimpanzee. Uncle Sauvadon thinks he looks divine. Such a fine name ! The women say " How distinguished, a Fitz-Roy ! "

It is the privilege of this name, of this long genealogy—among whom certainly there has been no lack of fools and contemptible toadies—that has obtained his admission to the Academy far more than his historical studies, a poor compilation, the first volume of which alone showed some talent. It is true that another man had written it for him ; and if the noble Fitz-Roy could see up there in the tribune of Queen Frédérique, that powerful, solid head from whence his best work had sprung, he would not perhaps pick up the notes of his speech with such an air of supreme and disdainful peevishness, and would not begin its perusal with that haughty circular glance that takes in all, but sees nothing. First of all, he skilfully and lightly disposes of the lesser works that the Academy is

crowning ; and in order to show how much this task is beneath him, he takes pleasure in crippling the names of the authors and the titles of the books. Most witty ! At last he reaches the Roblot prize, reserved for the finest historical work published in the five preceding years. "That prize, gentlemen, you are aware, has been awarded to Prince Herbert de Rosen for his magnificent '*Memorial of the Siege of Ragusa.*'" A formidable burst of applause greets these simple words thrown out in a resonant voice, with the gesture of a good sower. The noble Fitz-Roy allows this first enthusiasm to subside, then making use of an effective contrast, ingenuous but certain, he calmly, softly resumes : "Gentlemen." He pauses, casts a glance upon the expectant audience, now wholly his whom he holds at his mercy. He looks as if he would say, "Well ! suppose I did not choose to say anything more now. Who would be caught ?" But it is he who is caught, for, when he prepares to continue, no one listens to him.

A door up yonder has just slammed to in the box hitherto unoccupied. A woman has entered and has seated herself without seeking to attract attention, but to whom nevertheless the eyes of all present are drawn. Her sober costume, evidently made by the fashionable tailor of the day, embroidered with dark peacock feathers, her bonnet edged with gold lace, set off admirably her supple figure and the

delicate oval of this Esther's pale and lovely face—sure of her Ahasuerus. Her name is whispered from ear to ear ; all Paris knows her, for her luxury and her love have for the last three months been the topic of all conversations.

Her mansion, Avenue de Messine, recalled by the magnificence of its style the most brilliant days of the Empire. The newspapers have given the details of this society scandal, the height of the stables, the price of the paintings in the dining-room, the number of her carriages, the eclipse of the husband, who, more honest than another well-known Menelaus, not having chosen to live by his dishonour, had gone off to sulk abroad, like a betrayed husband of the "great



century." It is only the name of the purchaser that the chronicles have left unmentioned. At the theatre, the lady is always seated alone in front of a stage-box, while a pair of delicate moustaches remain concealed in the back-ground. At the races, at the Bois, ever alone in her carriage,

the empty place by her side filled by a huge bouquet, and on the panels round an unknown coat of arms, the trivial motto freshly painted, "*Mon droit, mon roy,*" which her lover has bestowed on her together with the title of Comtesse.

Now, there can be no doubt as to her rank as favourite. To have placed her there on such a day, amongst the places of honour reserved to sovereigns, to have given her as escort Wattelet, the liegeman of Christian and the Prince d'Axel, ever ready when some discreditable folly is to be committed, is to recognise her before all the world, and to stamp her publicly with the royal seal of Illyria. And yet her presence excites no feeling of indignation. It is the privilege of kings to enjoy immunity; their pleasures are as sacred as their persons in the aristocratic society where the traditions of Louis XIV. and Louis XV. have been preserved; when the mistresses of kings drove in the queen's carriages, and even took her place in the great hunts. A few fastidious humbugs like Colette de Rosen affect prudish airs, whispering their surprise that the *Institut* should admit creatures of that kind; but it is probable that each of these ladies is in possession of a pretty little marmoset, dying of consumption in her boudoir. On the whole, the impression produced is excellent. The clubmen say, "Quite the thing;" the journalists, "What cheek!"

Approval smiles on all sides, and the immortal themselves complacently eye the beautiful creature who sits without affectation in front of her box, only showing in her velvety eyes the fixed and determined unconcern of women who know themselves to be the centre of attention.

Curious glances are also cast in the direction of the Queen of Illyria, to watch how she accepts the situation. Oh! very well indeed! Not a feature, not a feather of her bonnet has moved. As she never mixes in society, Frédérique cannot know this woman; she has never seen her, and at first only looks at her in a careless manner.

“Who is it?” she asks the Queen of Palermo, who answers very quickly, “I do not know.” But in a neighbouring tribune a name pronounced out loud and repeated several times strikes her to the heart, “Spalato, Comtesse de Spalato.”

For several months past this name of Spalato had haunted her. She knows it to be that of Christian’s new mistress, who has only remembered that he is king to deck this creature of his pleasure with one of the greatest titles of his absent country. This has made her feel his present infidelity more keenly than a thousand others. But this last drop is the bitterest of all. There, opposite his wife and the royal child, sits this creature throning it like a queen: what an outrage! And hardly aware of the cause, Frédérique is stung still more cruelly by the refined

and delicate beauty of her rival. The challenge is too evident in the glance of those beautiful eyes, that smooth insolent brow, the red lips of that mouth which defies her. A thousand torturing thoughts rush through her brain : their distress, their daily mortifications ; only yesterday the coach-builder clamouring under her windows, whom Rosen had paid, for fear of a scandal. Where does Christian get the money he gives to this woman ? Since the discovery of the false stones she knows what he is capable of ; and something warns her that this Spalato is to be the dishonour of the king and his race. For one moment, one instant, her ardent nature tempted her to get up and leave the building, holding her child by the hand, to escape violently from this infamous neighbourhood, from this degrading rivalry. But she remembers that she is queen, wife and daughter of kings, that Zara is to be king one day ; and she will not give her enemies the joy of such a scandal. A dignity higher than that of the wife—a dignity which she has made the noble, though desperate, rule of her life—keeps her to her rank, here in public, as it does in the privacy of her devastated home. Oh, cruel destiny of these much-envied queens ! The effort she makes is so violent that the tears are about to start from her eyes, as the calm water of a lake splashes up under the stroke of the oar. Quickly, to avoid notice, she seizes her

opera-glass, and steadfastly, obstinately gazes at the gilded and uninteresting inscription : LETTRES, SCIENCES, ARTS, which through the glasses dimmed by her tears lengthen out and glitter in rainbow tints, over the head of the orator. The noble Fitz-Roy continues reading. It is in a style as colourless as the grey hue of a prison dress, this pompous eulogy of the "*Memorial*," this eloquent and powerful history, written by the young prince Herbert de Rosen, "who handles the pen as skilfully as the sword," above all the eulogy of the hero who has inspired it, "the chivalrous Christian II. who, in his own person sums up the grace, the nobility, the strength, the seductive cheerfulness which is ever found around a throne." (Applause and little cries of ecstasy.) Decidedly a kindly, sensitive, excitable audience, ready to seize the slightest allusions. At times, in the midst of these rounded phrases, a note rings true and striking, a quotation from the *Memorial*, for which the queen has furnished all the documents, everywhere substituting the king's name for her own, sacrificing herself for the benefit of Christian II. Oh, God of Justice, and this is how he rewards her ! The crowd hail, as they are uttered, the careless and haughty words of courage, the heroic acts simply performed, set out by the writer in a picturesque prose that reads like an epic tale of the olden times ; and perceiving the enthusiastic welcome given to these quotations,

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the noble Fitz-Roy, who is no fool, gives up his own literature and is content to peruse some of the finest pages of the book.

In the narrow classical building these words are like the vivifying, rapid stroke of a wing ; it seems as if the walls widened out, and that through the uplifted cupola a breath of fresh air had come in. They all breathe more freely ; the fans no longer betray by their rhythmic flutter the inattention of the public. No, indeed, the whole hall is standing, all heads upraised towards Frédérique's box ; they cheer, they hail the conquered but glorious monarchy, in the wife and son of Christian II., the last of kings, the last of knights ! Little Zara, intoxicated like all children by the noise and cheers, artlessly applauds, his little gloved hands tossing back his fair hair ; while the queen throws herself slightly back, carried away by the contagious enthusiasm, enjoying the happiness, the moment's illusion it gives her. Thus she has succeeded in surrounding by a halo, this puppet of a king behind whom she lies concealed ; she has been able to endow with a new lustre this crown of Illyria that her son will some day wear—a lustre which no one will ever be able to barter. Then what matter exile, misery or treachery ? There are dazzling moments in life before which all the surrounding gloom vanishes. Suddenly she turns round to render the homage of her joy to him who,

here, quite near her, his head leaning against the wall, his eyes vaguely upturned towards the cupola, listens to these magic sentences, forgetful that he has written them, assisting at this triumph without regret, without bitterness, without for one minute thinking that all this fame has been filched from him. Like those monks of the Middle Ages who grew old in erecting anonymous cathedrals, the son of the weaver is content with doing his work, with seeing it stand out boldly and firmly in the full blaze of noon. And, moved by the self-abnegation and the disinterestedness of his mystic smile, and because also she divines in him something that responds to her own feelings, the queen holds out to him her hand with a soft "Thank you." Rosen, standing near, thinks she is congratulating him on his son's success. He seizes the grateful gesture, and rubs against the royal glove his rough bristling moustache, and the two victims happy at the fête are reduced to exchanging from afar in a look those unuttered thoughts which bind souls together by mysterious and everlasting bonds.

It is finished. The sitting has come to a close. The noble Fitz-Roy, applauded, complimented, had disappeared as through a trap-door ; and "LETTRES, SCIENCES, ARTS" have followed him, leaving their places empty. Through every outlet the crowd that presses out begins to spread those rumours

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common to the end of a meeting or a play, and which the following day become the opinion of all Paris. Among the good people who are going out, many, pursuing their retrospective dream, expect to find their sedan chairs awaiting them at the gates of the *Institut*, but they find only the rain, pouring down amid the continual rattle of omnibuses and the sound of the tramway horns. Alone a few privileged ones preserve their monarchical illusions as their high-stepping horses bear them rapidly away.

Under the great colonnade, while an attendant calls up the royal carriages in the wet and glistening court, it is amusing to hear the lively exclamations of this aristocratic society as they wait the appearance of the Majesties. "What a success! What a sitting! If ever the Republic recovers from this." The Princesse de Rosen especially is much surrounded. "You must be very happy!" "Oh, yes, very happy." And prettily she prances, and bows right and left, like a little filly in a circus. Her uncle strives to do his best by her side, but still feels very awkward in his white cravat, and butler's shirt-front, which he endeavours to hide behind his hat; he is, nevertheless, very proud of the success of his nephew. Certainly he, better than anyone else, knows what a fraud this success is; he knows that Prince Herbert has not written one word of the prize essay, but at this moment he

does not think of that ; neither does Colette indeed. She is a true Sauvadon, so far as vanity is concerned ; appearances are sufficient for her, and when in the group of *gommeux* who are congratulating her, she perceives the waxed tips of her Herbert's great moustaches, she can hardly help throwing her arms round his neck, there, before everyone, so convinced is she that he had assisted at the siege of Ragusa, that he has written the *Memorial*, and that his handsome moustaches do not hide the jaw of a simpleton. And if the good fellow is delighted and confused at the ovation and admiring glances cast at him,—the noble Fitz-Roy has just solemnly assured him : “When you choose, prince, you will be one of us”—nothing is more precious to him than the unhopèd for greeting of his Colette, the loving way in which she leans on his arm, a thing that has not happened since their wedding-day, when they sailed down the nave of Saint-Thomas d'Aquin, amid the burst of sound from the great organ.

But the crowd parts, respectfully uncovering. The guests of the private boxes are coming down, all those fallen Majesties who are about to return into darkness after their brief resurrection of a few hours. A real procession of royal shades, the old blind man leaning on his daughter, the Galician with her handsome nephew, a rustle of stiff materials as on the passage of some Peruvian Madonna.

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Lastly Queen Frédérique, her cousin, and her son. A carriage draws up, and she steps into it, amid an admiring and repressed murmur, handsome, radiant, and proud. The left-handed wife has departed before the end with d'Axel and Wattlelet, so that nothing jars upon this triumphant departure. Now there is nothing more to say, nothing more to see. The tall footmen rush about with umbrellas. For an hour there is a continual pawing of steeds, rolling of carriages, slamming of doors, mingling with the downpour of rain, the names called out, repeated by the echoes that haunt ancient edifices, and which are not often heard at the old French *Institut*.

That evening the coquettish allegories painted by Boucher on the panels of Herbert's room, in the family mansion of the Rosens, must have been roused from their languishing attitudes and rather faded views of life, on hearing a little voice warble : "It is I ; it is Colette." It was in truth Colette, wrapped in a dressing-gown trimmed with floating laces, who came to say good-night to her hero, her knight, her genius ! At the same hour, Elysée was strolling alone in the garden of the Rue Herbillon, under the light foliage, faintly lit up by a clear bright sky, one of those June skies, in which the sun still seems to linger, and to cast the

sharp outline of the trees on the pallid windings of the paths, and to bleach the house and its closed shutters to the paleness of death. Alone, on the top story, the king's lamp kept watch. The dropping of water from the fountains, and the thrill of a nightingale to which other nightingales responded, alone broke the silence. These sounds mingled with the penetrating perfume of the magnolias, roses, and sweet-smelling verbena after the rain. And the fever that for two months, ever since the fair at Vincennes, had not left Elysée, which burns in his hands, and scorches his forehead, instead of being soothed by the perfumed and musical surroundings, throbs, vibrates, and fills his heart with emotion.

"Ah, fool, wretched fool," said a voice near him in the grove. Elysée stopped, speechless. It was so true, so precisely what he had been repeating to himself for the last hour.

"Fool, miserable maniac that you are! You ought to be thrown into the fire, you and your dried herbs."



“Is that you, councillor?”

“Do not call me councillor. I am no longer councillor. I am nothing. I have neither honour nor intelligence. Ah, *porco*.”

And Boscovich, sobbing with true Italian vehemence, shook his grotesque little head, fantastically illumined by the light that fell through the boughs of the lime-trees. The poor man had become somewhat crazed of late. At times, gay and talkative, he would bore everyone with his herbarium, his famous herbarium of Leybach, which he was soon to recover, he said; then, all of a sudden, in the midst of this whirl of talk he would interrupt himself, throw a side-long glance, and remain motionless and mute. On this occasion, Elysée thought he was going quite mad, when after this childish explosion, he bounded towards him, and seized his arm in a violent grasp, crying out in the night as though he were calling for help:

“This is impossible, Méraut. We must prevent it.”

“Prevent what, councillor?” said Elysée, trying to free his arm from the nervous clutch.

Then Boscovich, panting, added in a whisper:

“The deed of abdication is ready. I drew it up myself. At this very moment, His Majesty is signing it. I ought never to. *Ma che, ma che*. But he is the king; and then he promised to have my herbarium of Leybach given back to me. Such magnificent specimens!”

The maniac ran on, but Elysée, stunned by this terrible blow, no longer listened. His first, his only thought, was for the queen. Was this then the reward of her devotion, of her abnegation, the end of this day of self-sacrifice? How idle all the halo of glory so laboriously wreathed round this unconsenting brow! In the garden, now grown dim, he saw nothing but the glimmer of that lamp up yonder, lighting up the mystery of an imminent crime. What can he do? How prevent it? The queen alone; but can he get to her? And indeed, when Elysée presented himself, asking to speak to Her Majesty, the woman-in-waiting, Madame de Silvis already plunged in dreamland, the queen herself, all thought the house was on fire. In all the rooms was heard a chattering of bustling women, like an aviary startled before dawn. At last Frédérique appeared in the boudoir, where the tutor stood awaiting her, wrapped in a long blue dressing-gown, which set off her admirably shaped shoulders and arms. Never had Elysée felt himself so close to her.

“What is it?” she asked, in a low quick voice, with that nervous blink of eyelids that await a blow and see it coming. At his very first word she bounded forward.

“That cannot be. That shall not be while I am alive!”

The violence of her movement loosened the

phosphorescent tresses of her hair, and to fasten them up again she raised her arms with a tragic gesture, allowing her sleeves to slip down to her elbows.

“Awake his Highness,” she said in an undertone, in the shadowed softness of the adjoining chamber ; then, without adding a word, she went up to the king’s room.





X.

THE WRATH OF A QUEEN.

ALL the magic beauty of that June night poured in through the wide open casement in the great hall. A single lighted candelabra scarcely disturbed the mystery of the moonlight, which streamed in like a "milky way," touching up the polished bar of a trapeze, the arched bow of a suspended guzla, or the glass door of a half empty bookcase, the vacant spaces now filled up by Boscovich's new collection, that exhaled the faint faded smell of a cemetery of dried plants. On the table, across some dusty old papers, lay a crucifix of oxydized silver; for if Christian II. did not write much, he remembered his Catholic education, and surrounded himself with objects of piety; sometimes, indeed, while he was amusing himself in the society of loose women, while around him

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all was noise and revelry, his hand, already unsteady from drink, would steal into his pocket and tell the beads of the coral rosary, that never left him. By the side of the crucifix was a thick broad sheet of parchment, covered with a big and tremulous writing. It was the death-warrant of royalty, wanting nothing but the signature, one stroke of the pen, and a strong and violent effort of will to give this ; and that was the reason why this weak king hesitated, sitting motionless, his elbows resting on the table, by the lighted candles prepared for the royal seal.

Near him, anxious, prying, yet soft and smooth, like a night-moth or the black bat that haunts ruins, Lebeau, the confidential valet, watched him and silently encouraged him ; for they had arrived at the decisive moment that the gang had for months expected, with alternate hopes and fears, with all the trepidation, all the uncertainty attending a business dependent upon such a puppet as this king. Notwithstanding the magnetism of this overpowering desire, Christian, pen in hand, could not bring himself to sign. Sunk down in his armchair, he gazed at the parchment, and was lost in thought. It was not that he cared for that crown, which he had neither wished for nor loved, which, as a child, he had found too heavy, and that later in life had bowed him down and crushed him by its terrible responsibilities. He had felt no scruple in laying it aside, leaving it in

the corner of a room which he never entered, forgetting it as much as possible when he was out ; but he was scared at the sudden determination, the irrevocable step he was about to take. However, there was no other way of procuring money for his new existence, no other means of meeting the hundred and twenty thousand pounds' worth of bills he had signed, on which payment would soon be due, and which the usurer, a certain Pichery, picture-dealer, refused to renew. Could he allow an execution to be put in at Saint-Mandé ? And the queen, the royal child ; what would become of them in that case ? If he must have a scene—for he foresaw the terrible clamour his cowardice must rouse—was it not better to have it now, and brave once for all anger and recriminations ? And then—all this was not really the determining reason.

He had promised the Comtesse to sign this renunciation ; and on the faith of this promise Séphora had consented to let her husband start alone for London, and had accepted the mansion Avenue de Messine, and the title and name that published her to the world as the king's mistress, reserving, however, anything further till the day when Christian himself would bring her the deed, signed by his own hand. She assigned for this conduct the reasons of a woman in love ; he might, later on, return to Illyria, abandon her for the throne and power ; she would not be the first person whom these terrible State reasons have

made tremble and weep. D'Axel, Wattelet, all the *gommeux* of the Grand Club little guessed when the king, quitting the Avenue de Messine, rejoined them at the club with heavy fevered eyes, that he had spent the evening on a divan, by turns repulsed or encouraged, his feelings played upon, his nerves unstrung by the constant resistance; rolling himself at the feet of an immovable determined woman, who, with a supple opposition, abandoned to his impassioned embrace only the cold little Parisian hands, so skilful in defence and evasion, while she imprinted on his lips the scorching flame of the enrapturing words: "Oh! when you have ceased to be king, I shall be all yours—all yours!" She made him pass through all the dangerous phases of passion and coldness; and often at the theatre, after an icy greeting and a rapid smile, would slowly draw off her gloves and cast him a tender glance; then, putting her bare hand in his, she would seem to offer it up to his ardent kiss.

"Then you say, Lebeau, that Pichery will not renew?"

"He will not, Sire. If the bills are not paid, the bailiffs will be put in."

How well he emphasized with a despairing moan the word "bailiffs," so as to convey the feeling of all the sinister formalities that would follow: bills protested, an execution, the royal hearth desecrated, the family turned out of doors. Christina

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saw nothing of all this. His imagination carried him far away to the Avenue de Messine, he saw himself arriving there in the middle of the night, eager and quivering ; ascending with stealthy and hurried step the heavily-carpeted stairs, entering the room where the night-light burned mysteri-



ously veiled under lace : “It is done—I am no longer king. You are mine, mine.” And the loved one held out her hand.

“Come,” he exclaimed, starting out of his fleeting dream.

And he signed.

The door opened and the queen appeared. Her presence in Christian’s rooms at such an hour, was so unforeseen, so unexpected, they had lived so long

apart, that neither the king, in the act of signing his infamy, nor Lebeau, who stood watching him, turned round at the slight noise she made. They thought it was Boscovich coming up from the garden. Gliding lightly like a shadow, she was already near the table, and had reached the two accomplices, when Lebeau saw her. With her finger on her lips she motioned him to be silent and continued to advance, wishing to convict the king in the very act of his treachery, and avoid all evasion, subterfuge, or useless dissimulation ; but the valet set her order at defiance, and gave the alarm : “ The queen, Sire ! ” The Dalmatian, furious, struck straight in the face of this malevolent caitiff with the powerful hand of a woman accustomed to handle the reins ; and drawing herself up erect, waited till the wretch had disappeared before she addressed the king.

“ What has happened, my dear Frédérique ? and to what am I indebted for— ? ”

Standing bent over the table that he strove to hide, in a graceful attitude that showed off his silk jacket embroidered in pink, he smiled, and although his lips were rather pale, his voice remained calm, his speech easy, with that polished elegance which never left him when addressing his wife, and which placed a barrier between them like a hard lacquer-screen adorned with flowery and intricate arabesques. With one word, one gesture she put aside the barrier behind which he would fain have sheltered himself.

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“Oh ! no phrases, no grimacing—if you please. I know what you were writing there. Do not try to give me the lie.”

Then drawing nearer, overwhelming his timorous objection by her haughty bearing :

“Listen to me, Christian,” and there was something in her tone that gave an impression of solemnity to her words ; “listen to me : you have made me suffer cruelly since I became your wife. I have never said anything, but once—the first time, you remember. After that, when I saw that you had ceased to love me, I left you to yourself. Not that I was ignorant of anything you did—not one of your infidelities, not one of your follies remained unknown to me. For you must indeed be mad, mad like your father who died of exhaustion, mad with love for Lola ; mad like your grandfather John, who died in a shameful delirium, foaming and framing kisses with the death-rattle in his throat, and uttering words that made the Sisters of Charity grow pale. Yes, it is the same fevered blood, the same hellish passion that devours you. At Ragusa, on the nights of the sortie, it was at Fœdora’s that they sought you. I knew it, I knew that she had left her theatre to follow you. I never uttered a single reproach. The honour of your name was saved. And when the king was absent from the ramparts, I took care his place should not be empty. But here in Paris—”

Till now, she had spoken slowly, coldly, in a tone of pity and maternal reproof, as though inspired thereto by the downcast eyes and pouting mouth of the king, who looked like a vicious child receiving a scolding. But the name of Paris exasperated her. A city without faith, a city cynical and accursed, its blood-stained stones ever ready for sedition and barricades! What possessed these poor fallen kings, that they came to take refuge in this Sodom! It was Paris, it was its atmosphere tainted by carnage and vice that completed the ruin of the historical houses; it was this that had made Christian lose what the maddest of his ancestors had always known how to preserve: the respect and pride of their race. Oh! When on the very day of their arrival, the first night of their exile, she had seen him so excited, so gay, while all around him were secretly weeping, Frédérique had guessed the humiliation and shame she would have to undergo. Then, in one breath, without pausing, with cutting words that lashed the pallid face of the royal rake, and striped it red as with a whip, she recalled one after the other all his follies, his rapid descent from pleasure to vice, and vice to crime.

“You have deceived me under my very eyes, in my own house; adultery has sat at my table, it has brushed against my dress. When you were tired of that dollish little face who had not even the grace to conceal her tears, you went to the gutter,



wallowing shamelessly in the slime and mud of the streets, and bringing back the dregs of your orgies, of your sickly remorse, all the pollution of the mire. Remember how I saw you totter and stammer on that morning when, for the second time, you lost your throne. What have you not done, Holy Mother of angels! What have you not done! You have traded with the royal seal, you have sold crosses and titles."

And in a lower tone, as though she feared lest the stillness and silence of the night might hear, she added :

"You have stolen, yes, stolen! Those diamonds, those stones torn from the crown—it was you who did it, and I allowed my faithful Greb to be suspected and dismissed. The theft being known, it was necessary to find a sham culprit to prevent the real one ever being discovered. For this has been my one, my constant preoccupation: to uphold the king, to keep him untouched; to accept everything for that purpose, even the shame which in the eyes of the world will end by sullyng me. I had adopted a watchword that sustained me, and encouraged me in my hours of trial: 'All for the crown!' And now you want to sell it—that crown that has cost me such anguish and such tears; you want to barter it for gold, for the lifeless mask of that Jewess, whom you had the indecency to bring face to face with me to-day."

Crushed, bending low his head, he had hitherto

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listened without a word, but the insult directed against the woman he loved roused him. Looking fixedly at the queen, his face bearing the traces of her cutting words, he said politely, but very firmly :

“ Well, no, you are mistaken. The woman you mention has had nothing to do with the determination I have taken. What I am doing is done for you, for me, for our common happiness. Tell me, are you not weary of this life of privations and expedients ? Do you think that I am ignorant of what is going on here ; that I do not suffer when I see you harassed by a pack of tradespeople and duns ? The other day when that man was shouting in the yard I was coming in and heard him. Had it not been for Rosen I would have crushed him under the wheels of my phaeton. And you—you were watching his departure behind the curtains of your window. A nice position for a queen. We owe money to everyone. There is a universal outcry against us. Half the servants are unpaid. The tutor even has received nothing for the last ten months. Madame de Silvis pays herself by majestically wearing your old dresses. And there are days when my councillor, the keeper of the royal seals, borrows from my valet the wherewithal to buy snuff. You see I am well acquainted with the state of things. And you do not know my debts yet. I am over head and ears in debt. Everything is giving way around us. A pretty state of

things, indeed ; you will see that diadem of yours sold one day at the corner of a street with old knives and forks.”

Little by little, gradually carried away by his own scoffing nature, and the jesting habits of his set, he dropped the moderate tone he commenced with and in his insolent little snuffing voice began to dwell upon the ludicrous side of the situation, with jeers and mockery, borrowed no doubt from Séphora, who never lost an opportunity of demolishing by her sneering observations the few remaining scruples of her lover.

“ You will accuse me of making phrases, but it is you who deafen yourself with words. What after all is that crown of Illyria that you are always talking about. It is worth nothing except on a king’s head ; elsewhere it is obstruction, a useless thing, which for flight is carried hidden away in a bonnet-box or exposed under a glass shade like the laurels of an actor or the blossoms of a *concierge’s* bridal wreath. You must be convinced of one thing, Frédérique. A king is truly king, only on the throne with power to rule ; fallen, he is nothing, less than nothing, a rag. Vainly do we cling to etiquette, to our titles, always bringing forward our Majesty, on the panels of our carriages, on the studs of our cuffs, hampering ourselves with an empty ceremonial. It is all hypocrisy on our part, and mere politeness and pity on the part of those who surround us—our friends and our servants.

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Here I am King Christian II. for you, for Rosen, for a few faithful ones. Outside I become a man like the rest. Monsieur Christian Two. Not even a surname, only 'Christian,' like an actor of the Gaité."

He stopped, out of breath ; he did not remember having ever spoken so long standing. The shrill notes of the night-birds, the prolonged trills of the nightingales broke the silence of the night. A big moth that had singed its wings at the lights flew about, thumping against the walls. This fluttering distress and the smothered sobs of the queen were the only sounds to be heard ; she knew how to meet rage and violence, but was powerless before this scoffing banter, so foreign to her sincere nature ; it found her unarmed, like the valiant soldier who expects straight blows and feels only the harassing stings of insects. Seeing her break down, Christian thought her vanquished, and to complete his victory he put the finishing touch to the burlesque picture he had drawn of kings in exile. What a pitiful figure they cut all these poor princes *in partibus*, figurants of royalty, who drape themselves in the frippery of the principal characters, and declaim before the empty benches without a farthing of receipts. Would they not be wiser if they held their peace and returned to the obscurity of common life ? For those who have money there is some excuse. Their riches give them some right to cling to these grandeurs. But the others, the

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poor cousins of Palermo for instance, crowded together in a tiny house with their horrid Italian cookery. It smells of onions when the door is opened. Worthy folk certainly, but what an existence! And those are not the worst off. The other day a Bourbon, a real Bourbon, ran after an omnibus. 'Full, sir,' said the conductor. But he kept on running. 'Don't I tell you it is full, my good man.' He got angry, he would have wished to be called 'Monseigneur,' as if that should be known by the tie of his cravat!"

"Operetta kings, I tell you, Frédérique. It is to escape from this ridiculous position, to ensure a dignified and decent existence, that I have made up my mind to sign this."

And he added, suddenly revealing the tortuous Slavonic nature moulded by the Jesuits :

"Moreover, this signature is really a mere farce. Our own property is returned to us, that is all, and I shall not consider myself in the slightest degree bound by this. Who knows? These very thousands of pounds may help us to recover the throne." The Queen impetuously raised her head, looked him straight in the eyes for a moment, then shrugged her shoulders, saying :

"Do not make yourself out viler than you are. You know that when once you have signed—but no.—The truth is, you lack strength and fortitude, you desert your kingly post at the most perilous moment, when a new society, that will acknowledge

neither God nor master, pursues with its hatred the representatives of divine right ; makes the heavens tremble over their heads and the earth under their steps. The assassin's knife, bombs, bullets, all serve their purpose. Treachery and murder are on every side. In the midst of our pageantry or our festivities, the best of us as well as the worst, not one of us does not start if only a man steps forward out of the crowd. Hardly a petition that does not conceal a dagger. On leaving his palace what king is certain of returning alive ? And this is the hour you choose to leave the field ! ”

“ Ah ! if fighting could do it,” eagerly said Christian II. “ But to struggle as we do against ridicule, against poverty, against all the petty meannesses of life, and feel that we only sink deeper every day— .”

A ray of hope lit up her eyes :

“ Is it true, would you fight ? then listen.”

Breathlessly, she related in a few rapid words, the expedition she and Elysée had been preparing for the last three months, by letters, proclamations and despatches, which Father Alphée, ever on the move, carried from one mountain village to the other ; this time it was not to the nobility they appealed, but to the people ; the muleteers, the porters of Ragusa, the market-gardeners of Breno, of la Brazza, the islanders who go to market in their feluccas, the nation which had remained faithful to the monarchical tradition, which was

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ready to rise and die for its king, on condition that he should lead them. Companies were forming, the watchword was already circulating, only the signal now remained to be given. The Queen hurling her words at Christian to rout his weakness by a vigorous charge, had a cruel pang when she saw him shake his head, showing an indifference which was even greater than his discouragement. Perhaps at the bottom of his heart he was annoyed that the expedition should have been so far organized without his knowledge. But he did not believe in the feasibility of the plan. It would not be possible to advance into the country ; they would be compelled to hold the islands, and devastate a beautiful country with very little chance of success ; a second edition of the duc de Palma's adventure, a useless effusion of blood.

“No really, my dear Frédérique, you are led away by the fanaticism of your chaplain and the wild enthusiasm of that hot-headed Gascon. I also have my sources of information, far more reliable than yours. The truth is, that in Dalmatia as in many other countries, monarchy has had its day. They are tired of it, they will have no more of it.”

“Oh ! I know the coward who will have no more of it,” said the Queen.

And she went out hurriedly, leaving Christian much surprised that the scene should have ended so abruptly. He hastily thrust the deed into his pocket, and prepared to go out in his turn, when

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Frédérique reappeared, accompanied this time by the little prince.

Roused out of his sleep and hurriedly dressed, Zara, who had passed from the hands of his nurse to those of the queen without a word having been uttered, opened wide his bewildered eyes under his auburn curls, but asked no questions ; he remembered confusedly in his poor little dizzy head, similar awakenings for hasty flights, in the midst of pallid faces, and breathless exclamations. It was thus that he had acquired the habit of passive obedience ; that he allowed himself to be led anywhere provided the queen called him in her grave and resolute voice, and held ready for his childish weakness the shelter of her tender arms and the support of her strong shoulder. She had said : " Come ! " and he had come with confidence, surprised only at the surrounding silence, so different from those other stormy nights, with their visions of blood and flames, roar of cannon, and rattle of musketry.

He saw the king standing, no longer the careless good-natured father, who at times surprised him in his bed or crossed the school-room with an encouraging smile, but a stern father, whose expression of annoyance became more accentuated as he saw them enter. Frédérique, without uttering one word, led the child to the feet of Christian II. and abruptly kneeling, placed him before her, crossing his little fingers in her joined hands :

“The king will not listen to me, perhaps he will listen to you, Zara. Come, say with me, ‘Father’.” The timid voice repeated, “Father.”

“My father! my king! I implore! do not despoil your child; do not deprive him of the crown he is to wear one day. Remember that it is not yours alone, it comes from afar, from God himself, who gave it six hundred years ago to the House of Illyria. God has chosen me to be a king, father. It is my inheritance, my treasure, you have no right to take it from me.”

The little prince accompanied his fervent murmur with the imploring looks of a supplicant; but Christian turned away his head, shrugged his shoulders, and furious though still polite, he muttered a few words between his teeth: “Exaggeration! most improper; turn the child’s head.” Then he tried to withdraw and gain the door. With one bound the queen was on her feet, caught sight of the table from which the parchment had disappeared, and comprehending at once that the infamous deed was signed, that the king had it in his possession, gave a despairing shriek:

“Christian!”

He continued to advance towards the door.

She made a step forward, picking up her dress as if to pursue him; then suddenly said:

“Well, be it so.”

He stopped short, and turned round. She was standing before the open window, her foot upon

the narrow stone balcony, with one arm clasping her son ready to bear him into death, the other extended menacingly towards the cowardly deserter. The moon lit up from without this dramatic group.

“To an operetta king, a queen of tragedy,” she said stern and terrible. “If you do not burn this instant what you have just signed, and swear on the cross that it will never be repeated, your race is ended, crushed, wife and child, there, on the stones.”

Such earnestness seemed to inspire her vibrating tone, her splendid figure bent towards the emptiness of space as though to spring, that the king, terrified, dashed forward to stop her.

“Frédérique !”

At the cry of his father, at the quiver of the arm that held him, the child—who was entirely out of the window—thought that all was finished, that they were about to die. He never uttered a word nor a moan ; was he not going with his mother ! Only, his tiny hands clutched the queen’s neck convulsively, and throwing back his head with his fair hair hanging down, the little victim closed his eyes before the appalling horror of the fall.

Christian could no longer resist. The resignation, the courage of this child, who of his future kingly duties already knew the first : to die well, overcame him. His heart was bursting. He threw upon the table the crumpled parchment which for a moment he had been nervously holding in his hand, and fell sobbing in an armchair. Frédérique,

still suspicious, read the deed through from the first line to the very signature, then going up to a candle, she burned it till the flame scorched her fingers, shaking the ashes upon the table ; she then left the room, carrying off her son, who was already falling asleep in her arms, in his heroically tragic attitude.





XI.

THE VIGIL.

A MEAL is just over in the bric-à-brac dealer's parlour. Old Leemans, when alone, was accustomed to gobble up a crust at one end of the kitchen table, opposite to la Darnet, without either tablecloth or napkin ; when he had company, as on this evening, the careful Auvergnate grumblingly took off the white covers of the furniture, put away the little squares of carpet, and set the table in front of the portrait of " Monsieur " in the little room, as peaceful and tidy as a *cure's* parlour, which for a few hours is filled with the odours of garlic, and

resounds with vehement discussions carried on in the slang of low and sordid bartering.

Ever since the "grand stroke" has been in preparation, these dinners at the dealer's shop have been frequent.

It is advisable in affairs of this kind, where profits are shared, that the parties concerned in them should meet frequently and plan their schemes together; and nowhere else could it be done as securely as in the depths of this little street Eginhard—forgotten amid the remains of old Paris. Here, at any rate, talk might be as loud as they pleased, discussion and combination as lively as they fancied. They are drawing near the goal.

In a few days, nay! in a few hours, the deed of renunciation will be signed, and the affair which has already swallowed so much money, will in its turn begin to produce some. The certainty of success kindles the eyes and voices of the guests with a golden hue of joyousness, and makes the table-cloth look whiter, the wine taste better. A real wedding banquet, presided over by old Leemans and Pichery, his fidus Achates—a stiff barber's block of a head well anointed with pomatum, and appearing above a buckram stock, something military, yet not quite above-board about it, the air of an officer degraded from his rank. His profession: usurer in pictures, a new and complicated trade well suited to the art mania of our time. When a young fellow is completely

cleared out, and has not a shilling left, he goes to Pichery, picture dealer, in his sumptuous gallery of the rue Lafitte.

“Have you got a Corot? A real good one?” he says. “I am quite cracked about that painter.”

“Ah! Corot!” Pichery replies, closing his dead fish-like eyes with rapt admiration; then all at once, changing his tone: “I have the very thing for you,” and rolling forward a great easel, he displays a very pretty Corot, a morning scene all tremulous with silvery mists and nymphs dancing under the willows. The fashionable youth puts up his eyeglass, pretends to admire and says:

“Good! very good! How much?”

“Two thousand pounds,” says Pichery, without wincing. The other does not wince or blink either.

“At three months?”

“Three months, with security.”

The fool puts his name to the bill, carries off the picture to his own rooms or those of his mistress, and during a whole day, gives himself the pleasure of boasting at the club and on the boulevard of the wonderful purchase he has made of a “stunning Corot.” Next day, he sends his Corot to be put up at auction, and Pichery buys it again through old Leemans at four or five hundred pounds, its real value. It is usury, and at an exorbitant rate; but it is not illegal, and therefore without danger. Pichery, for his part, is not bound to know whether the amateur has bought in good faith or

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not. He sells his Corot very dear ; has thoroughly "fleeced" his client ; and he is within his rights : for the value of an artistic object is arbitrary and changeful. Moreover, he takes care only to deal in thoroughly authentic merchandize, warranted by father Leemans, who furnishes him into the bargain with the whole of his artistic vocabulary, which sounds surprising enough in the mouth of this painted-up old soldier, who stands on the best of terms with the gilded youth and the whole frail population of the Quartier de l'Opéra, whose patronage he courts for the sake of his traffic.

On the other side of the patriarch Leemans, sat Séphora and her husband, their chairs and their glasses drawn close together as if they were two lovers. They see each other but rarely since the beginning of this affair ! J. Tom Levis, who is supposed to be in London, lives shut up in his castellated villa at Courbevoie, spends his days in fishing with rod and line for lack of dupes to lay snares for, or occupies himself by playing atrocious practical jokes on the Sprichts. Séphora, watched more strictly than a Spanish queen, obliged to be ever in readiness for the king, at all hours in full war-paint and ceremony, leads the life of the select *demi-monde*—a life so filled with nothings and yet so empty, that these ladies nearly always live two together, in order to be able to endure the long, aimless drives, and the wearisome leisure. But the Comtesse de Spalato has not her equal in

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the town. She cannot associate with the mixed company of this border-land ; nor will respectable women visit her, and Christian II. would not tolerate around her the fluttering crowd of idlers who fill the drawing-rooms frequented only by men. Thus she must remain for ever alone in her boudoirs, amid the painted ceilings, the mirrors garlanded with roses and cupids, that never reflect any other image than her own indolent figure, bored to death with all the insipid sentiment the king pours forth at her feet, like pastilles for sick headaches wasting slowly on golden burners. Ah ! how quickly and joyfully would she not exchange this life of princely melancholy for the little low room in the rue Royale, with her merry-andrew beside her, executing his famous jig of the "Grand Strokes." She could hardly even find means to write to him, to keep him informed of the progress of the affair and the turn it was taking.

Thus it was that she was very happy this evening, pressed close to him, excited him, stirred him up to amuse her ! "Come, make me laugh." And indeed Tom bestirred himself well ; but his mirth was forced and fell after each burst, gnawed by a tormenting thought that he did not avow, and that no one could have guessed. Tom Levis was jealous ! He knew well there could be nothing as yet between Séphora and Christian, and that she was far too crafty and clever to give anything without value received ; but the psychological moment was drawing near, and when once the paper


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was signed, execution could be no longer delayed. And our friend Tom was seized with scruples and qualms that were strange indeed in a man so completely free from all superstition or prejudice. Never had his wife appeared to him so charming, and the title of Comtesse seemed to make her eyes brighter, her features more dainty, while a coronet of pearls almost appeared to his fancy to rest on her bright hair. Evidently J. Tom Levis is not equal to his part, his shoulders are not broad enough for the business. A mere nothing would be enough to make him take back his wife and leave the whole affair stranded. But a feeling of shame holds him back, a fear of ridicule, and then so much money is invested in the speculation. The unlucky wretch struggles with himself, torn by these various scruples of which the Comtesse his wife would never have thought him capable; he affects the wildest gaiety, gesticulates with the dagger twisting in his heart all the while, keeps the table alive with excellent stories of the tricks of the trade, and finally puts old Leemans and even the glacial Pichery himself into such good spirits that they bring forth their best anecdotes, the finest mystifications of the unlucky amateur.

Here, among associates, pals, and in the free and easy atmosphere of after-dinner, anything may be related, all the under-currents of the auction-room, its bye-ways and pit-falls, the ring formed by the great dealers, rivals in appearance only, their greedy

exchanges and traffic, the mysterious freemasonry that puts a real barrier of greasy collars and thread-bare coats between the rare curio and the buyer's caprice, forcing him to ridiculously high prices. It was a tournament of cynical anecdotes, a tilting to show forth who was the most adroit, the most rascally of them all.

“ Did I tell you the story of my Egyptian lantern and Mora ? ” asks father Leemans, sipping his coffee in little gulps ; and for the hundredth time he begins to relate—like an old soldier his favourite campaign—the story of the lantern that a Levantine in difficulties sold to him for eighty pounds and that he sold again the same day for sixteen hundred pounds to the President of the Council, with a double commission—twenty pounds from the Levantine and two hundred pounds from the duke. But what constituted the charm of the story were the ruses, the dodges, the way in which he had inflamed the fancy of the rich and vain buyer. “ Yes, a fine piece, to be sure, but too dear—much too dear. I should really recommend you, Monsieur le Duc, to leave such a piece of folly to someone else. I feel sure that Sismondi ! Ah ! it is pretty work too, this chasing and this wrought chain.” And the old fellow, excited by the laughter that shook the table, turns over the leaves of a little pocket-book, with dog's-eared corners that he lays upon the table-cloth, and from whence he renews his inspiration, with a date, a number, an address. In

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it, all famous amateurs are classed, like heiresses of large fortunes on the books of the famous matrimonial agent, Monsieur Foy : with all their peculiarities and manias, dark or fair: those who require a little bullying, those who only believe an object valuable when its price is high, the sceptical amateur, the naïf amateur to whom you may say, as you sell him an utter fraud: "And you know you should never be persuaded to part with this." In itself this book was a small fortune.

"Look here, Tom," says Séphora to her husband in the wish to make him shine, "suppose you tell them that story of when you first arrived in Paris, you know, your first affair, in the rue Soufflot."

Tom needs no urging, pours himself out a little brandy to give himself a stronger voice, and relates how a dozen years or so ago, on returning from London, ruined and threadbare, one last half-crown in his pocket, he learned through an old comrade he met in an English tavern close to the station, that the matrimonial agencies were at that very moment occupied with a great affair, the marriage of Mademoiselle Beaujars, the daughter of a contractor, who had twelve millions of francs (four hundred and eighty thousand pounds) as her fortune, and had taken into her head that nothing would serve her but to marry some great nobleman. A magnificent commission was promised, and the bloodhounds were many on the scent. Tom, nothing disconcerted, entered a reading-room,

turned over all the pedigrees of France, the almanac of Gotha, the directory Bottin, and finally discovered an ancient, very ancient family allied to the greatest houses, and lodged in the rue Soufflot. The disproportion of the title with the name of the street seemed to point to some blemish in the family or to impoverished fortunes. "On what floor does Monsieur le Marquis de X. live?" He sacrificed his last coin and obtained the necessary information from the concierge. Yes, in truth a title of great antiquity—a widower, a son just leaving Saint-Cyr, and a daughter of eighteen very well brought up. "Eighty pounds a year rent, including gas, water, and carpeted stairs," added the concierge, for whom all this added to the dignity of his tenant. "Just the thing for me," thought J. Tom Levis, and up he went, a trifle nervous all the same at the well-to-do look of the staircase—a statue at the entrance, armchairs on every landing, all the luxury of a modern house, with which strongly contrasted his own threadbare coat, his shoes that let the water in, and his very indelicate commission.

"Half-way up," continues the narrator, "I was tempted to go down again. But it seemed to me only plucky to make the attempt. I said to myself: 'You are sharp and cool, and have to earn your living, so here goes. Fortune favours the brave!' and up I went, two steps at a time. I was shown into a great drawing-room, of which the inventory could have been quickly taken. Two or

three fine antiques, pompous remains of grandeur ; a portrait by Largillière ; but under all poverty was visible : the worn-out divan, the barely-stuffed chairs, the chimney-piece cold as its own marble. The master of the house appeared at last, a majestic old fellow in the best style—Samson in *Mademoiselle de la Seiglière*. ‘ You have a son, Monsieur le Marquis ? ’ At the first words ‘ Samson ’ rises indignant ; I name the figure, four hundred and eighty thousand pounds ! and he calms down, seats himself, and we talk. He begins by owning to me that he has not a fortune equal to his name, twenty thousand francs (eight hundred pounds) at the utmost, and that he would not be sorry to have wherewithal to regild his escutcheon. The son would have a hundred thousand francs (four thousand pounds) on his wedding-day. ‘ Oh ! Monsieur le Marquis, the name would be enough ! ’ Then we fix the rate of my commission, and I hurry away in great haste, being expected at my office. That was good ! my office ! I did not even know where I should sleep that night. But at the door the old fellow drew me back, and said in a confidential tone : ‘ Come now ! you seem to me a clever fellow. I have something else to propose to you. You ought to find me a husband for my daughter as well. She has no fortune ; for to tell the truth, I exaggerated just now in speaking of an income of eight hundred a year. Take off the largest half. I have, however, a title of

Count of the Holy Roman Empire at my disposal for my son-in-law. And, moreover, if he is in the army, my influence and relationship with the Minister of War will enable me to ensure his speedy promotion



and advancement.' When I had finished taking my notes : 'Rely upon me, Monsieur le Marquis,' said I and was about to go, when a hand was laid heavily upon my shoulder. I turned round : 'Samson' was looking at me, and laughing with a comical air. 'And then there is myself,' said he. 'What you, Monsieur le Marquis !' 'Yes, indeed ; I am not so totally played out, and if I could find a good opportunity——'

He ended by confessing to me that he was overwhelmed with debts, and not a penny to pay them with. 'By Jove ! my dear Monsieur Tom, if you can unearth me some good lady in business, owning fair savings, old maid or widow, send her to me, money-bag and all ; I will make a marquise of her.' When I left that room, my education was finished. I understood all that could be made out of Parisian society ; and the Levis agency was virtually founded."

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The story was a marvel narrated or rather acted, by Tom Levis. He rose, sat down again, imitated the majestic air of the old nobleman, with its touch of cynical Bohemianism, and the way in which he spread his handkerchief over one knee before crossing his legs, and the disclosure made in three confessions of the real poverty of his resources. It might have been a scene from the *Neveu de Rameau*, only a Rameau's nephew of the 19th century, without powder, grace, or violin, and with something hard and fierce in the intonation of this English bulldog merged in the jesting loafer of the faubourgs. The others laughed, enjoyed the joke, and drew from Tom's story reflections both philosophical and cynical.

"D'ye see, my dears," said old Leemans, "if dealers could agree among themselves, they would be the masters of the world. Every mortal thing is sold sooner or later, now-a-days. Everything must come to us in time, must pass through our hands, leaving some of its substance behind. Only to think of all the business done for the last forty years in this hole of a shop in the rue Eginhard—of all I have melted, sold, exchanged, patched up. The only thing that had never passed through my hands was a crown, and now I have got that." He rose, glass in hand, with eyes fiercely glittering: "Jobbing for ever, my boys!"

In the background, la Darnet's black Cantal headgear nodded attentively, watching all, listen-

ing to everything, drinking in information on bartering and haggling : for she hoped to establish a business for herself whenever "Monsieur" should die, and deal in curiosities on her own account.

Suddenly the cracked door-bell was violently agitated, wheezing like a cold of long standing. Everyone started. Who could it be at such an hour ?

"It is Lebeau," said the old father. "It can be no one else."

Loud exclamations welcomed the valet, who had not been among them for some time, and who now entered with set teeth, pale and haggard, looking knocked up and in the worst of tempers.

"Sit there, old chap," said Leemans, making room for him between himself and his daughter.

"The deuce !" said Lebeau, glancing at their flushed faces, at the table, and remains of the dinner. "You seem to be amusing yourselves famously here."

The observation, and the funereal tone in which it was made, caused them all to look uneasily at each other.

Certainly they are amusing themselves, having great fun. And why not ! why should they be melancholy ?

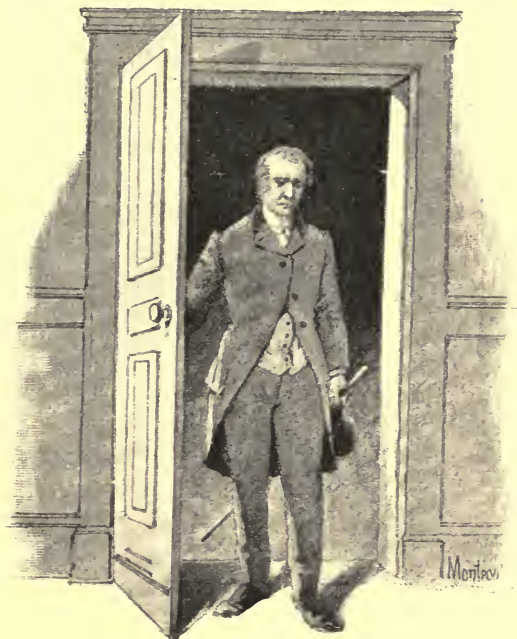
Monsieur Lebeau seems stunned with amazement.

"What ! you don't know ? When did you last see the king then, comtesse ?"



“ Why this morning, yesterday, every day ! ”

“ And he said nothing to you of the terrible row there has been ? ”



Then, in a few words he described the scene, the burnt parchment, the affair thus reduced to ashes.

“ Ah ! the wretch, I am done ! ” said Séphora.

Tom with great uneasiness gazed into the depths of his wife's eyes. Had she by any chance been

imprudently weak? But the lady was in no humour to give explanations, being wholly given over to her rage and indignation against Christian, who for the last week had been entangling himself in a labyrinth of lies to explain how it was that the act of abdication was not yet signed.

Oh! coward! coward and liar! But why had not Lebeau warned them?

“Ah! indeed why?” said the valet with his hideous smile. “Simply because I could not. For the last ten days I have been running hither and thither, five hundred leagues without breathing time, without drawing rein. Not even the chance to write a letter, for I was watched incessantly by an awful monk, a Franciscan Father, who had the scent of a wild beast, and fingered a dagger like a bandit. He watched my every movement, never took his eye off me for a moment, under the pretext that he did not know enough French to get about alone and make himself understood. The truth is, they suspect me at Saint-Mandé, and have taken advantage of my absence to work a big thing.”

“What is it?” asked all eyes.

“An expedition in Dalmatia, I fancy. It is that demon of a Gascon who has worked them up to it. Oh! I was right when I said at the very first that we ought to have got rid of that fellow to begin with.”

It was in vain they had tried to hide what was

going on from the valet; he had for some time scented preparations in the wind—letters leaving at all hours, mysterious councils frequently held. One day, opening an album of water-colour sketches, which that little fool the Princesse de Rosen had left about, he had seen designs of uniforms, various costumes: *Illyrian Volunteers, Dragoons of the Faith, Blue Garibaldians, Cuirassiers of the Divine Right.* Another day, he overheard a grave discussion between Madame de Silvis and the princess on the shape of the cockades. From all this, from fragments of words he concluded some great expedition was in contemplation; and the journey he had been made to take had in all probability something to do with it.

The little dark man, a sort of hunchback, whom he had been sent to fetch from the mountains of Navarre, must be some great chief destined to lead the army under the orders of the king.

“What! The king goes too?” cried father Leemans with a contemptuous glance towards his daughter.

A confused torrent of words followed this exclamation.

“And how about our money?”

“And the bills he has signed?”

“It is a shame.”

“It is a theft.”

And as, nowadays, politics represent the famous dish of *Æsop*, and are mixed in everything,

Pichery, very Imperialist, stiff as his own buckram stock, apostrophizes the Republic :

“Under the Empire such a menace to the tranquillity of a neighbouring state could never have been prepared.”

“Certainly,” says Tom Levis, gravely, “you may be sure, if this were known at the Presidency, it would not be allowed. We must give notice, we must bestir ourselves.”

“Yes, I had thought of that,” replied Lebeau ; “unfortunately I know nothing precise, nothing for certain. They would not listen to me. And then our people up there are on their guard, all their precautions are taken to turn aside suspicion. For instance, this evening is the Queen’s birthday. There is to be a great *fête* at the Rosen’s mansion. Not much use going to tell the authorities that all those dancers are busy conspiring and preparing for battle ! All the same, there is something unusual about this ball.”

Then only did they remark that the valet was in evening dress, thin shoes, white tie ; he had the management of the refreshment tables at the ball, and must return as quickly as possible to the Ile-Saint-Louis. Suddenly the Comtesse, who had been thinking deeply for a few moments, said :

“Look here, Lebeau, if the king does go, you would know, would not you ? You would be called if only to pack his portmanteau. Well, let me know, only an hour beforehand, and I swear to you, the expedition shall not come off.”

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She said this in her most tranquil voice, with a slow but decided firmness. And while J. Tom Levis dreamily asked himself by what means Séphora would prevent the king from starting; while the other associates, all crestfallen, were calculating what the failure of the affair would cost them, Master Lebeau, returning to his ball,



hastened along on the points of his pumps through the labyrinth of little dark streets, with old-fashioned roofs and escutcheoned doors, that composed this quarter, which in the last century was aristocratic, but is now transformed by workshops and manufactories; and tremulous all day from the passage of heavy drags and the constant movement of the swarming and wretched population, resumes at night its curious appearance of a dead city.

The *fête* could be heard and seen from afar in the summer night, and sent over both banks of the Seine widespread echoes of sound, while the lights streamed forth like the red and misty glare of a conflagration from that extreme point of the island which, jutting out into mid-stream, seems to be the rounded and lofty poop of some huge vessel at anchor. On a nearer approach could be distinguished the tall windows gleaming beneath their hangings, the myriad-coloured lights in girandoles attached to the shrubs and venerable trees of the garden, and on the Quai d'Anjou, generally asleep at this hour, the lamps of the carriages pierced the darkness with their little motionless beacons. Since Herbert's marriage, the Rosen's mansion had not witnessed a similar festivity, and that now going on was even more splendid, more overflowing, than the former; all the doors and windows stood open to the splendour of the starry night.

The ground floor was formed of a long gallery of saloons opening one out of the other; lofty as a cathedral, and adorned with paintings and antique gilding; chandeliers of Dutch and Venetian make and lanterns of mosques hung from the ceilings and shed their light upon strange decorations; hangings shimmering with gleams of red and green gold; heavy shrines of massive silver, deeply carved ivories set in frames, old mirrors with blackened faces, reliquaries, standards, treasures from Montenegro and Herzegovina that Parisian taste had

known how to assemble and group together without anything appearing too striking or barbaric. The orchestra was ranged upon the tribune of an ancient oratory that called to mind that of Chenonceaux, and was surrounded by streamers that sheltered armchairs reserved for the king and queen ; and in contrast with these relics of the past, these magnificent antiques reflected on every side which would have delighted the heart of father Leemans, circled and fluttered the whirlwind of the modern waltz, seductive and dreamy, a vision of long embroidered trains, of fixed and brilliant eyes flashing amid the mist of fluffy tresses, passing and re-passing like a challenge of youth—a delicate vision of fair beauty and dark creamy pallor. Every now and again, out of this circling net-work of dances, of this medley of silken stuffs that adds a coquettish and mysterious murmur to the music of a ball-room, a couple would detach themselves, and stepping out through the lofty French window would receive upon their receding heads, the white glare of the illuminated pediment where the Queen's cipher figured in flaming gas, and advancing through the alleys of the garden, they would continue with some hesitation, caused by the increasing distance from the music, the rhythm of the dance, and finish their waltz in a cadenced step, an harmonious walk among the great balmy clumps of magnolias and roses. Indeed, putting aside the richness and strangeness of the setting, and a few

foreign women with wild locks, and the indolent supple movements peculiar to Slavonians, it seemed at first sight to be only one of those fashionable mixed entertainments such as the Faubourg Saint-Germain, represented at the Rosen's mansion by its most ancient and pompous names, sometimes gives in its old gardens in the rue de l'Université, where the dance passes from waxed floors to green lawns, where black coats may be found enlivened by light grey trousers—open air fêtes fit for summer weather—freer, and more exuberant in gaiety than others.

In his bedroom on the second floor the old duke, a martyr for a week past to an attack of sciatica, listened to the echoes of his ball, and smothered between his blankets the exclamations of pain and the barrack-room objurgations that escaped him, on the ironic cruelty of the illness that pinned him to his bed on such a day, making it impossible for him to join all this assemblage of youth about to start on the morrow. The word had been given, the posts in the struggle fixed, and this ball was a farewell, a kind of bravado, a defiance offered to the chances of war, at the same time a precaution against the curiosity of the French police. If the duke could not accompany the volunteers, he had the consolation of reflecting that his son Herbert would take part in the affair, and his good gold pieces as well, for their Majesties had graciously permitted him to defray the cost of the expedition.


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On his bed, mixed with ordnance maps and strategical plans, were strewn bills for stores, cases of guns, boots, blankets, provisions, all of which he carefully checked, with terrible frowns and twistings of his moustache; the heroic feelings of the royalist warring with his parsimonious niggardly instincts. Sometimes a number or a fact was wanting; then he sent for Herbert—a pretext to keep at his side for a few minutes the



great son who was to leave him to-morrow for the first time, whom he would perhaps never see again, and for whom he experienced an immense affection, ill-concealed beneath a stately manner and chilly silence. But the prince could not remain long,

being in haste to go down again to do the honours of the house, and above all to lose as little as possible of the brief hours he could still pass in the society of his beloved Colette. Standing at his side in the first saloon, she helped him to receive his father's guests, prettier and more elegant than ever in her close-fitting dress, draped with the antique lace of a Greek alb, of which the creamy tint well set off her delicate beauty, marked this evening by an almost serious air of mystery. It gave repose to her features, depth to her eyes, bringing them to the hue of the blue cockade displayed among her curls beneath a diamond aigrette. Hush! low be it spoken, a cockade for an Illyrian volunteer, a pattern adopted for the expedition and designed by the princess. She had not been wanting in activity any more than the rest during the last three months, the dear little soul. Copying proclamations, carrying them secretly to the convent of the Franciscans, designing costumes and banners, keeping the police—whom she believed to be ever at her heels—off the scent, thus inspired by her readings at the *Sacré-Cœur* did she play her rôle as a great royalist lady. One detail only was wanting in this programme of Vendean brigandage : she could not start with the others or follow her Herbert. For now it was Herbert, nothing but Herbert ; by a beautiful provision of nature she thought no more of the other than of the unfortunate marmoset so

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cruelly crushed on the neighbouring pavement. The joy of putting on a man's costume, and of wearing miniature jack-boots was denied to Colette for two reasons : one the duty that kept her at the queen's side, the other, quite personal and intimate, had been whispered the evening before into the aide-de-camp's ear. Yes ! if it was not a delusion, in a space of time easily calculated from the day of the academic *séance*, the race of Rosen would be increased by one little representative the more, and it was out of the question to expose so dear and precious a hope to the fatigues of an expedition that could not be expected to terminate without some few rough and bloody sword-thrusts, any more than it was advisable to take a turn of waltz round the splendid rooms. Here were many secrets for the little woman to keep, and notwithstanding the mystery she preserved in speech, her delightfully tell-tale eyes and the languid manner in which she leant on Herbert's arm, betrayed it all without an effort on her part.

Suddenly the orchestra was silent, the dance stopped ; everyone stood up for the entry of Christian and Frédérique. They have crossed the three saloons resplendent with national treasures, where the queen may read her cypher everywhere, arranged in flowers, lights, jewels, and see on all sides the souvenirs of her country and its glories ; and now they stop at the entrance to the garden. Never had the monarchy been represented more

bravely, with greater brilliance ; truly a couple to imprint on the coinage of a nation, on the pediment of a dynasty. The queen in particular was magnificent, looking younger by ten years in a

white dress, and round her neck as her only jewel a

magnificent necklace

of amber, whence hung

a cross. Blessed and

presented by the Pope,

this necklace had its

legend, related in whis-

pers by the faithful.

Frédérique had worn

it all through the siege

of Ragusa ; twice it

had been lost and miraculously

found during sorties, under fire.

She held a superstition about it

herself, a queenly vow was asso-

ciated with it, and she wore it

without troubling herself as to the

charming effect these pearls of

mellow and transparent gold produced so near to her tresses, of which they seemed to catch a reflection.

While the sovereigns stood here radiant, admiring the fête and the garden with its fairy illuminations, three notes sounded from a violin concealed amid a clump of rhododendrons, three wild, strange, soul-stirring notes. Every drop of Slav blood in the



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assembly quivered and leapt at the sound of its national *guzlas*, with their long necks peeping through the dark verdure. They began with a prelude full of movement, murmuring, humming, ringing with the gradually approaching overflow of far-off waves, sonorous in their advance as they rise and spread. It was like some heavy cloud, full of electricity, that from time to time was torn into zig-zag flashes by the keenest note of the bow, and from whence presently poured forth the stormy, voluptuous, heroic national air, hymn and dance at one and the same time ; that air of Rodoïtza, which in its country is part of every fête, of every battle, and well represents the two-fold character of its ancient legend : Rodoïtza, fallen into the hands of the Turks, simulates death to escape. They light fire on his chest, the hero stirs not. They place a serpent in his bosom, they drive nails beneath his finger-nails, he preserves a stone-like immobility. Then they bring Haïkouna, the finest, most lovely girl in Zara, who begins to dance while singing the



Illyrian national air. At the first bars, when Rodoïtza hears the sequins of the dancer's necklace chink, and the fringes of her sash rattle and shake, he smiles, opens his eyes, and would be lost were it not that the dancer approaching him, in one bound, throws over the face whose animation will betray him, the silken kerchief with which she accentuates and marks the rhythm of her dance. Thus the hero was saved, and this is why for two hundred years the national air of Illyria is called the Rodoïtza march.

Hearing it thus, beneath the skies of exile, all the Illyrians, both men and women, turned pale with emotion. This cry from the *guzlas* with a soft accompaniment from the orchestra in the background within the house, like a murmuring of waters above which resounds the shrill cry of the stormy-petrel, was as the voice of the country itself, overflowing with memories and tears, regrets and unspoken hopes. The huge bows, heavy and shaped like the bow of the archer, were not drawn across commonplace strings, but upon nerves strained to breaking-point, upon the most delicately vibrating and responsive fibres. These young men of proud and hardy temperament, with the stature and figure of heroes, all feel capable of the indomitable courage of Rodoïtza, who thought himself well paid by a woman's love; these handsome Dalmatians, all tall as Haïkouna, have, like

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her, a tender spot in their hearts for heroes. And the elders, in thinking of the far-distant country ; the mothers, as they watched their sons,—all could have sobbed ; and all, but for the presence of the king and queen, would have joined their voices to the shrill and strident cry that the guzla-players sent forth with all the force of their lungs as they finished playing, amid a last clash of chords that rose with it towards the stars.

Directly afterwards, dancing was resumed with a vigour and spirit surprising in circles where to amuse oneself is a polite fiction. Decidedly, as Lebeau had said, there was something unusual about this *fête*. Something feverish, passionate, full of ardour, expressed in the closer pressure of the dancers as they swung round together, the sparkling glances that flew and crossed, even the cadence of the waltzes and mazurkas, in which sometimes came a note like the clink of stirrups and spurs. Towards the end of most balls, when morning begins to shine through the windows, the last hour of pleasure is marked by this eager haste, these drugged languors. But here the ball had barely begun, and already all hands burned within the gloves that covered them, all hearts beat beneath the flowers of the bodice or the diamonds of the orders ; and when a couple passed by, intoxicated by love and the rhythm of the dance, long interested glances followed them with tender and

softened smiles. And, indeed, everyone knew that all these fine young men,—scions of Illyrian nobility exiled in company with their prince, French nobility always ready to shed its blood in a good cause—were to start at sunrise on a venturesome and perilous expedition. Even in case of victory, how many of these proud young fellows, who have enlisted without taking count of their numbers, will return? How many in a week's time will be biting the dust, laid low on the mountain sides while the maddening tune of the last mazurka still rings in their ears, mingling with the confused throbbing of the fast-ebbing blood! It is the approach of danger that adds to the spirit of the ball the anxiety of a night under arms, brings tears and lightning glances to shine in the eyes, with so much languor, and so much audacity. What can a woman refuse to him who is leaving her perhaps for speedy death? And this said death, hovering over all, the rustle of whose wings can be heard almost touching them in the swell of the violins, how it hastens confessions and draws closer the embrace! Light and fugitive loves, chance meeting of ephemeræ crossing the same sunbeam! Perhaps they have never met before, doubtless will never meet again; yet here are two hearts fallen under the spell. A few, the more haughty, try to smile notwithstanding their emotion; but how much sweetness is there beneath


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this irony. And all this crowd turns and turns, each couple fancying itself alone, shut off from the rest, bewildered amid the magic entanglement of a waltz by Brahms or a mazurka of Chopin's.

Not less moved than the rest was Méraut, in whom the music of the guzlas, by turns of dreamy softness or wild energy, awoke the adventurous gipsy spirit that lies dormant in the depths of all these temperaments of the sunny south, a wild desire to rush away through unfamiliar ways towards light, adventures, battles, to do some valiant and brave action for which women would admire him. He who never danced, and would not have known any better how to fight, was possessed by the witchery of this heroic ball; and to reflect that all these youths were about to start to give their blood, to run the gauntlet of glorious and dangerous enterprise while he remained behind with the old men, the women and children, to think that having organized this crusade he must see it set forth without him, all this caused him an inexpressible sadness and discomfort. The thought that had conceived felt shame before the action that executed. And perhaps what contributed something to this discouragement, this wish for death inspired by the Slav songs and dances, was the radiant pride of Frédérique as she leant on Christian's arm. How self-evident was her happiness on finding again the king and warrior in her

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husband ! Haïkouna, Haïkouna ! at the ring and clatter of arms you can forget all, pardon all—treasons and lies alike ! What you love above all things is physical bravery, it is to that you will always throw the handkerchief hot with your tears and the delicate perfume of your own fair face. And while he thus mourned within himself, Haïkouna, perceiving in a corner of the drawing-room the poet's wide brow over which fell in unfashionable style the abundant and rebellious locks, Haïkouna smiled and made a sign to him to approach. One might suppose she had guessed the cause of his sadness.

“What a charming fête, Monsieur Méraut.”

Then lowering her voice, she added :

“I owe even this to you. But we owe you so much, it is difficult to know how to thank you.”

It was he indeed whose robust and vivifying faith had breathed upon all these extinct embers, brought back hope to despair, and prepared the rising by which they were to profit on the morrow. The queen did not forget it, and there was no one in the illustrious assembly to whom she would have spoken in the presence of all, with that kindly deference, those glances of gratitude and gentleness, in the centre of the respectful circle traced around the sovereigns. But Christian II. drew near, and offering his arm to Frédérique :

“The Marquis de Hezeta is here,” he said to Elysée. “Have you seen him ?”

“ I do not know him, Sire.”

“ He declares, however, that you are very old friends. Stay, here he is.”

This Marquis de Hezeta was the chief who in the absence of the old General de Rosen was to command the expedition. He had shown in the last bold coup of the Duc de Palma's astounding qualities as commander of an army corps, and had he been listened to, the skirmish would never have ended so shamefully and pitiably. When he saw his efforts were in vain and that the pretender himself gave the example and signal for flight, the *cabecilla*, overcome with disappointment and misanthropy, had fled to the depths of the Basque mountains and lived far from the rumour of childish conspiracies, of false hopes, of sword-thrusts in water, that wasted his moral forces. He wished to die obscurely in his own country, but was tempted once more to the game of adventure by the alluring royalism of Father Alphée and Christian II.'s renown for bravery. High rank and ancient family, a romantic existence composed of exile and persecution, chequered with great and startling *coups de main* and the habitual practice of the cruelties of a fanatic, all conspired to surround the Marquis José Maria de Hezeta with an almost legendary interest and to make him the chief personage of the evening.

“ How do you do, Ely ?” said he, advancing

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towards Elysée with outstretched hand, and calling him by his childhood's name—that by which he was known in the *enclos de Rey*. “Yes, it is I. Your old schoolmaster, Monsieur Papel.”

The evening-dress, covered with orders and crosses, and the white cravat made no change in him, nor yet the twenty years that had passed over the huge dwarf's head, so burnt by the smoke of battle and the keen weather of his mountain home, that the great vein of the forehead, frightful and characteristic as it was, could scarcely be seen. With it seemed to have faded the royalist fervour, as if the *cabecilla* had left in the crown of the Basque biretta, thrown into a torrent at the end of the campaign, a portion of his ancient beliefs, of the illusions of his youth.

Elysée was strangely surprised to hear the voice of his old master, he who had made him what he was.

“You see, my little Ely——”

Little Ely was a good two feet taller than his old master, and his locks were plentifully sprinkled with grey.

“It is all over ; there are no more kings. The principle exists still, but the men are wanting. Not one of these dismounted horsemen is capable of getting into the saddle again ; not one really wishes it. Ah ! what I have seen, what I have seen, during the war ! ”

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A gory mist seemed to float round his head, and filled his fixed and stony eyes, which, growing larger and larger, appeared to gaze upon visions of shame, cowardice, and treasons.

“But all kings are not alike,” protested M é r a u t, “and I am sure that Christian——”

“Yours is worth no more than ours—a child, a mere dabbler. Not an idea, not a vestige of will in those pleasure-loving eyes. Only look at him !”

He indicated the king, who just then waltzed into the saloon, his little round head bent with swimming eyes over the bare shoulder of his partner, that his lip seemed on the point of touching. In the increasing animation of the ball the couple passed without noticing them, so close that they almost felt the warmth of their panting breath ; and as the gallery filled rapidly to watch Christian II. dance—for he was the best waltzer in his kingdom—Hezeta and M é r a u t took refuge in one of the deep recesses of the great open windows overlooking the Quai d’Anjou. There they remained a long time, half-way between the noise and commotion of the ball and the refreshing darkness, the calm silence of the night.

“Kings no longer believe in themselves ; kings no longer have any strength of will. Why should we give ourselves any trouble about them ?” said the Spaniard, gloomily.

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“You no longer have faith in them, and yet you go?”

“Yes, I go.”

“Without hope?”

“One only. That of breaking my head, my poor head, that I no longer know where to lay.”

“And the king?”

“Oh! that fellow! I am quite easy about him!”

Did he mean to say that Christian II. was not yet in the saddle, and that like his cousin, the Duke of Palma, he would always be sure of returning safe and sound from the battle? He did not explain himself further.

Around them the ball continued to whirl in mad circlings, but Elysée now looked at it through the discouraged vision of his old master and his own disillusionings. He felt a boundless pity for all this valiant troop of youths, who were so gaily preparing to fight under chiefs devoid of faith in their undertaking; and already the *fête*, its confused bustle, its shaded lights, seemed to him to disappear in the smoke of the battlefield, the vast scuffle of disaster in which the unknown dead are gathered up. Once, for a moment, to escape this sinister vision, he leant upon the window-sill, turning towards the deserted quay, whereon the palace threw lengthened squares of light that stretched away to the Seine. And the water, as he

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listened to it tossing and tumultuous at this point of the island, mingled the noise of its currents, its furious shocks against the arches of the bridges, with the sighs of the violins, the thrilling cry of the guzlas ; and sometimes bounded onwards with short gasping sounds, like the sobs of an afflicted spirit ; and sometimes spread itself forward in great exhaustive waves, like the blood welling from a wide-open wound.





XII.

THE NIGHT TRAIN.

“ WE start this evening at eleven o'clock from the Gare de Lyons. Destination unknown. Probably Cette, Nice, or Marseilles. Do as you think best.”

When this note, rapidly pencilled by Lebeau, reached the Rue de Messine, the Comtesse de Spalato, fresh, sweet, and supple, had just left her bath, and was busy in her room and her boudoir, watering

and tending her flowers and hothouse plants, with light *Suède* gloves drawn up to the elbow, for this her daily walk through her artificial garden. She was not in any degree affected by the news, but paused a moment to reflect, in the softened light admitted through the lowered blinds, and with a little decided gesture, a shrug of her shoulders which meant: "Pooh, who wants the end takes the means;" she rang for her maid that she might be ready to receive the king.

"What dress does madame wish to put on?"

Madame threw an inquiring glance at her mirror.

"None," she said; "I will remain as I am."

Nothing, indeed, could be more becoming than the long clinging pale flannel robe with its soft pleats, the large neckerchief crossed on her bosom and tied behind her waist, and the curly tresses of her black hair, twisted and raised high in heavy coils on her head, revealing the curve of her neck and the line of her shoulders, which were evidently of a darker hue than her face,—of the warm, smooth tint of amber.

She thought, with good reason, that no amount of dressing could equal this simple *négligée*, that set off the ingenuous, childlike air which the king liked so well in her; but this obliged her to breakfast in her room, for she could not go down into the dining-room in such a costume. She had put her household on an eminently respectable foot-

ing ; it was no longer the fanciful Bohemian style of Courbevoie. After breakfast, she settled herself in her boudoir, from which a covered verandah gave a prolonged view of the avenue, and began her watch for the king, peaceably seated under the rosy-tinted blinds, just as in former days she had sat at the window of the "family hotel." Christian never visited her before two, but from that moment began an anguish of waiting quite new to this placid nature ; an expectation, which was no more at first than the tremor of water that is about to boil, but which presently becomes fevered, agitated, persecuting. Hardly any carriages passed at this hour on the quiet avenue, with its double rows of plane-trees bathed in sunlight, and of new mansions coming to an end at the gilded gates, and sparkling lamp-posts of the Parc Monceaux. At every sound of wheels, Séphora drew aside the blind to look out, and the disappointment of each new hope was aggravated by the luxurious serenity and provincial calm of the avenue.

What could have happened ? Would he really leave without seeing her ?

She sought for reasons, for pretexts ; but expectation is a state that keeps the whole being in suspense ; our very ideas float undecided, and remain as unfinished as the words that hover on stammering lips. The Comtesse endured this torment, the sickly faintness in which the nerves

are in turn strained and relaxed. Once more she raised the rose-tinted blind. A soft breeze was rustling in the green tufts of the branches, a fresh air rose from the avenue, which was washed in sharp and rapid jets by the water-carts, interrupted at every moment by the passing carriages, now more numerous, going up towards the Bois de Boulogne for the five o'clock drive. She now began to be seriously alarmed at the desertion of the king, and sent off two letters, one addressed to the house of Prince d'Axel, the other to the club. Then she dressed herself, for she could not remain till evening in the costume of a little girl who has just left her bath; and she resumed her walk from her room to her boudoir, to her dressing-room, and soon throughout the whole house, in her attempt to baffle the torment of waiting by dint of agitation.

It was not a mere bijou residence the Spalato had bought, nor one of those huge mansions that millionaire financiers have crowded into the aristocratic new quarters of the Parisian West-end, but an artistic home worthy of the names borne by the surrounding streets: Murillo, Velasquez, Van Dyck; and very unlike its neighbours from the top of its façade to the knocker on the door. Built by Comte Potnicki for his mistress, an ugly woman to whom he every day presented a thousand franc note (forty pounds) which he placed folded in four on the marble

toilet-table, this marvellous dwelling had been sold for eighty thousand pounds with all its artistic furniture at the death of the rich Pole, who had left no will, and Séphora had purchased it with all its treasures.

The Comtesse Spalato descends the massive staircase of sculptured wood fit to support a coach and pair, which gives to the severe beauty of the lady the dark background of a Dutch picture; she enters the reception rooms of the ground floor: the first is called the Dresden china-room, a small Louis XV. room, which contains an exquisite collection of enamelled vases and statuettes in the fragile style of the 18th century, looking as if it were kneaded by the rosy finger-tips of the king's favourites and animated by the fascination of their smile; the second, called the Ivory room, where, within glass cases lined with crimson, collections of Chinese carved ivories are displayed, representing human figures, trees laden with jewelled fruits, fishes with eyes of jade, by the side of ivory crucifixes of the middle ages with passionately mournful expression of face, and red wax imitation of blood looking like a stain on the pallor of a human skin; the third, lighted up like a studio and hung with Cordova leather, is as yet incomplete and awaits father Leemans' finishing touch.

The heart of the *bric-à-brac* dealer's daughter habitually exults in the midst of these her precious

possessions, made more precious in her eyes by the wonderful bargain she had made, but to-day she goes and comes without looking at them ; she sees nothing, for her thoughts are far away, lost amid a thousand irritating reflections. What ! he would leave her thus. Did he not love her then ? she who thought she had so successfully caught and captivated him.

The footman returns. No news of the king. He has not been seen anywhere. That was just like Christian. Aware of his own weakness he had fled. A fit of uncontrollable rage for a moment seizes hold of the woman and breaks down her wonderful self-control.

She would have dashed to pieces all that surrounds her in an instant if her long habit of traffic, which mentally labelled the price of every separate article, did not restrain her. Plunged in an arm-chair, while the closing day draws its veil over her newly-acquired riches, she sees them all vanish and disappear together with her colossal dreams of fortune. Suddenly the door opens, and the servant announces :

“Dinner is on the table.”

She must sit at her table alone in the majestic dining-room, its light panels filled with portraits by Franz Hals valued at thirty-two thousand pounds, pale and solemn figures in their stiff ruffles, not so solemn, however, as the butler in his white cravat, who carves at the side-table the dishes that are

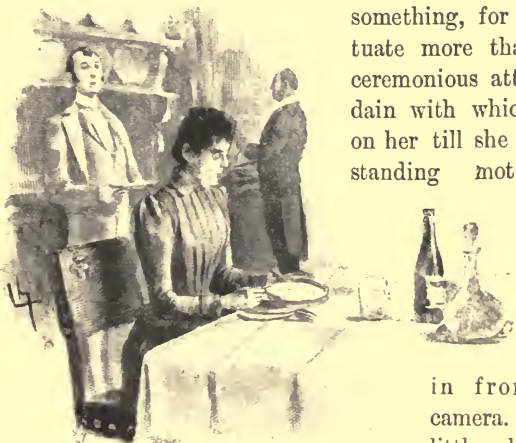
handed to the Comtesse by two impassive flunkeys in gorgeous livery. The irony of this pompous service, contrasting with the solitude and desolation that menace Madame de Spalato, wrings her heart with vexation ; it might even be thought

that the servants suspect something, for they accentuate more than usual the ceremonious attitude of disdain with which they wait on her till she has finished, standing motionless and

severe, like a photographer's assistant after having fixed the customer

in front of the camera. Little by little, however, the

deserted woman cheers up and returns to her normal condition. No, she will not allow herself to be cast off like this. Not that she cares for the king. But the scheme, the grand stroke, the good opinion of her associates, all her self-love is at stake. Her mind is soon made up ! She goes to her room, writes a letter to Tom ; then, while the servants in the basement are dining and gossiping about the lonely and agitated



day their mistress has spent, the Comtesse with her clever little hands prepares a travelling-bag that has often made the journey to and fro between the agency and Courbevoie, throws a grey woollen cloak over her shoulders as a protection against the cold night air, and furtively quits her palace, going off in the direction of the nearest cabstand on foot, her little bag in her hand, just like a lady's-companion who has been dismissed from her place.

On his side, Christian II. had passed a no less anxious day. He had, with the queen, remained very late at the ball, and had awoke with his head and heart re-echoing with the heroic strains of the guzlas. The preparations for the expedition, his arms to look over as well as the costume of lieutenant-general that he had not put on since Ragusa, all this took up his time till eleven o'clock, under the watchful and anxious gaze of the perplexed Lebeau, who did not dare to hazard too many questions or insinuations. At eleven the court assembled to assist at a low mass said by Father Alphée in the drawing-room, transformed into a chapel for the occasion, the mantel-piece being turned into an altar and its velvet draperies covered over by an embroidered altar-cloth. The Rosens were absent, the old duke still in bed, and the princess having accompanied Herbert as far as the station, whence he had started with some young men. Hezeta was to

follow by the next train, and the little band was thus to leave in detachments throughout the day in order not to attract attention. This secret mass, that recalled the former troubled times, the fanatical face of the monk, the martial energy of his voice and gesture, all seemed to call up a mingled smell of incense and powder—a religious ceremony solemnized by the approach of battle.

All these mixed emotions cast a gloom over the breakfast-table, although the king affected a certain coquetry in leaving nothing but pleasant recollections behind him, and adopted a respectfully tender attitude towards the queen, which, however, was received with a suspicious coolness by Frédérique. The child glanced timidly from one to the other, for the terrible scene of that other night haunted his young memory, and gave him a nervous intuition above his age. The Marquise de Silvis heaved beforehand deep sighs of farewell. As for Elysée, all his faith had returned, and he could not contain his joy as he thought of the counter-revolution he had so long dreamed of, made by the people; of the insurrection which would break open the gates of a palace to reinstate a king. For him success was not doubtful. Christian, however, did not feel the same confidence; but except for a certain feeling of uneasiness that accompanies every departure, when a sudden sensation of solitude is cast over all, the premature separation from the beings and sur-

roundings habitual to every-day life, he felt no sinister apprehensions, rather a sort of release from a false position, oppressed as he was by pecuniary embarrassments and debts of honour. In case of victory, the civil list would settle everything. Defeat, on the contrary, would bring with it a general collapse : death, a bullet through the head while facing his enemies ! He thought of this, as a definite solution for his monetary and love affairs, and his careless indifference did not jar too much with the preoccupations of the queen, and the enthusiasm of Elysée. However, while they were talking together, all three in the garden, a footman happened to pass by.

“Tell Samy to bring the carriage round,” ordered Christian. Frédérique started.

“You are going out ?” she inquired.

“Yes, I think it more prudent,” he replied. “Yesterday’s ball must have set all Paris talking. I must show myself, be seen at the club, on the boulevards. Oh ! I shall return and dine with you.”

He ran up the steps, joyous and free, like a schoolboy leaving the class-room.

“I shall be anxious till he is gone !” said the queen ; and Méraut, knowing as much as she did, could not find a word of encouragement.

The king had, nevertheless, taken strong resolutions. During mass, he had vowed to himself that he would not see Séphora again, knowing well

that if she chose to detain him, if she passed her arms round his neck, he would be powerless to leave her. In all good faith he had himself driven to the club, found there some bald-pates absorbed in silent whist, or slumbering majestically round the great library table. Everything looked deserted and dead ; the more so, that play had run high on the previous night. In the morning, as the whole set of clubmen were leaving H.H. Prince d'Axel at their head, a troop of she-asses passed in front of the club, trotting and jingling their bells. Monseigneur had sent for the driver, and the whole party, after having drank the warm milk in champagne glasses, had mounted the poor beasts in spite of their kicks and the driver's vociferated remonstrances, and had ridden the most ridiculous races all along the Rue de la Paix.

It was amusing to listen to the pompously affected account of Monsieur Bonceil, the manager of the Grand Club : "No ! it was too funny ! Monseigneur was on a tiny she-ass, obliged to tuck up his long legs—for Monseigneur is admirably gifted in legs ; and his imperturbable coolness. Ah ! if his Majesty had been there."

His Majesty indeed regretted having missed such a delightful madcap freak. Lucky Prince d'Axel ! On bad terms with the king his uncle, turned out of his country by some court intrigues, he will probably never reign, since the old monarch talked of marrying again some young woman, who would

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bear him a host of little presumptive heirs. All this did not disturb his equanimity. To amuse himself in Paris seemed far more interesting to



him than being engaged in politics at home. And little by little the bragging, sceptical, scoffing spirit once more took possession of Christian, as he lay back on the divan on which the Prince Royal had left the impress of his contagious indolence. In the idle atmosphere of the club, all the heroic

impulses of the previous day and the morrow's expedition appeared to him equally devoid of glory, magic, and grandeur. The longer he remained there, the more he became demoralized ; and to escape the torpor that seemed to invade his whole being like a stupefying poison, he rose and went down into the living, active, bustling life of the boulevards.

Three o'clock ! The hour at which he usually went off to the Avenue de Messine, after having breakfasted at the club or at Bignon's. Mechanically his footsteps led him in the habitual direction of that summer quarter of Paris, larger but less heady than the other, full of such charming views, such airy perspectives, with its green masses against stone walls, and the shadows of foliage cast on the white asphalt of the avenues.

What a number of pretty women glide under the trees, half hidden by their parasols, with all the gracefulness and seductive charm of their sparkling good-humour ! What other women can walk, drape themselves in the grace of their very step, talk, dress, or undress themselves like these ? Ah ! Paris, Paris, city of pleasure and fleeting hours ! To think that to make more sure of losing all this, he was, perchance, going to have a bullet put through his head ! And yet what a good time he had had ! what thorough and complete voluptuousness he had enjoyed !

The fervour of his gratitude threw a bright look

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into the Slav's eyes as he gazed at all these passing women, who by one flutter, one fan-like sweep of their dress, captivated him. There was a vast difference between the knightly king who that morning, by the side of his wife and child, bent low in his oratory before starting for the conquest of his kingdom, and this pretty lady-killer, with his nose in the air, and his hat placed with a conquering swagger on his round, curly head, fevered by the pursuit of pleasure. Frédérique was not wrong in cursing the Parisian hotbed, in dreading its effect upon this vacillating nature, ever in fermentation, like certain wines that have no body.

At the corner of the Boulevard Haussmann and the Avenue de Messine Christian paused for a moment, and let several carriages pass by. Here, reason recalled him to himself. How had he got there, so quickly?

The Hôtel Potnicki stood out in the vaporous sunset with its two little turrets and its balcony draped like an alcove. What a temptation! Why should he not go in? why should he not see once more the woman who would henceforth remain in his life as the dry, parched remembrance of an unsatisfied desire?

At last, after a moment's terrible debate, after a hesitation visibly betrayed by the reed-like swaying of his weak body, he took an heroic decision, jumped into an open cab that was passing by, and gave the address of his club. Never would he

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have had this courage, if it had not been for the oath he had taken that very morning during mass. For his effeminate, pusillanimous soul this was stronger than anything.

At the club he found Séphora's letter, which by its odour of musk, communicated the fever that had dictated it. The prince handed him her other note : a few hurried, imploring phrases, written in a very different handwriting from that of Tom Levis's ledgers. But here Christian II., sustained by the observant looks around him, felt stronger : for he was one of those whose attitude depends very much upon an audience. He crumpled up the letters into his pocket. The fashionable youth of the club were now arriving, full of the story of the donkey race, that had been given at full length in one of the morning papers. The paper passed from hand to hand, and it was greeted with the weak, foolish laugh of unamused and worn-out men.

"Are we going to have a lark to-night?" inquired these young scions of nobility as they absorbed soda-water or the mineral waters with which the club was as well stocked as a chemist's shop.

Carried away by their high spirits, the king consented to dine with them at the Café de Londres : not in one of the saloons which had so often been witnesses of their drunken debauchery, whose mirrors bore their names written, crossed, and mixed like a winter's frost upon window-panes :

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but in the cellars, those admirable catacombs of casks and bottles which stretch out their long regular lines of bins marked with china labels, as far underground as the Opéra Comique. All the vintages of France slept there. The table had been laid at the further end, amid the Château-Yquem, whose greenish recumbent bottles, spangled by the reflection of the gas and coloured glass chandeliers, softly glistened in their bins. This fancy had been inspired by Wattelet, who wished to mark, by an original repast, the departure of Christian II., which was known only to him and to the prince. But the effect was lost by the dampness of the walls and the ceilings, which soon penetrated the guests, wearied by the preceding night's gaieties. Queue-de-Poule could hardly keep his eyes open, and every now and then awoke with a start. Rigolo spoke little, laughed, or rather pretended to laugh, and pulled out his watch every five minutes. He might, perhaps, be thinking of the queen, and of the anxiety she must be undergoing at his delay.

At dessert there appeared a few women who had been dining at the Café de Londres, and who, hearing that the princes were downstairs, had left their tables, and, guided by the waiters carrying lighted candelabras, crept down into the cellars, holding their long skirts over their arms, with the little screams and the frightened airs usual on these frolicksome occasions. Nearly all were bare-shouldered.

In five minutes they were all coughing and shivering with cold by the side of the men, who at least had the collars of their coats to turn up. "A freak fit to send them all into a galloping consumption," said one of them, more chilly or less of a madcap than the others. It was decided to go and take coffee upstairs in the saloons, and, during the move, Christian disappeared. It was barely nine o'clock. He found his brougham waiting at the door.

"Avenue de Messine," he said, in a low tone, through his clenched teeth.

The craze had seized upon him like a sudden fever. During the whole of the dinner he had been haunted by her, only her, breathing in the rapturous vision conjured up by the naked shoulders of the women around him. Oh! to clasp her in his arms, deaf to her tears and prayers.

"Madame is gone out."

The words fell like a cold douche on a fiery brazier. Madame had gone out! The sight of the house, left to the discretion of the servants whom Christian had seen flying in every direction at his entrance, could leave him no doubt. He asked no further questions, and suddenly recalled to his senses, he realized the appalling depth of the abyss into which he had so nearly fallen. A perjurer to his God! a traitor to his crown! His burning fingers met his little rosary. He muttered *Aves* to return thanks for his escape, while the



carriage rolled off in the direction of Saint-Mandé, through the fantastic views and mysterious nocturnal aspects of the wood.

“The king,” cried Elysée, who was watching at



the drawing-room windows and saw the two lamps of the brougham dash into the courtyard like flashes of lightning. The king! It was the first word that had been uttered since dinner. As by magic all faces brightened, all tongues were loosed. The queen herself, notwithstanding her self-control and apparent calm, could not keep back her cry of

joy. She had thought that all was lost; that Christian had been taken possession of by that woman; that he had abandoned his friends, and had dishonoured himself for ever. And there was not a being around her who, during those three mortal hours of suspense, had not had the same thought, the same anxiety; even little Zara, whom she had kept sitting up, and who, comprehending the anguish, the dramatic meaning of the general silence, never ventured a question,—those cruel, telling questions, which children will make in their sweet clear voices. Sheltered behind the leaves of a large album, he suddenly raised his pretty face when the king was announced, a face bathed with the tears that had been flowing silently for the last hour. Later on, when he was questioned as to this great grief, he confessed that he was in despair at the thought that the king had left without embracing him. Loving little soul, to whom this young, witty, ever-smiling father appeared like a big brother, a delightful brother whose wild pranks, however, caused the despair of their mother.

Christian's voice was heard, sharp and hurried, giving his last orders. Then he went up into his room, and five minutes later appeared ready equipped for the journey in a little round hat with blue band and coquettish buckle, and dainty gaiters, like one of those sea-side tourists painted by Wattelet. The monarch was, however, to be discerned beneath the garb of the dandy, by his air of

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authority, and the ease of manner he showed under every circumstance. He approached the queen, and murmured an apology for his dilatoriness. Still white with emotion, she said, in a low voice :

“If you had not come, I should have gone with Zara in your stead.” He felt that she spoke the truth, and for a moment there flashed across his brain the vision of the queen with the child in her arms, in the midst of the bullets, just as on the balcony during that last terrible scene, when the little fellow had so resignedly closed his eyes before impending death. Without saying a word, he raised Frédérique’s hand fervently to his lips ; then with a youthful impetuosity, drew her towards him, saying : “Forgive me, forgive me !”

The queen no doubt would still have forgiven him, but she caught sight of Lebeau, the knavish valet, the confidant of his master’s pleasures and faithlessness, standing near the door ready to accompany the king ; and a horrible idea at once crossed her mind while she quietly freed herself from his embrace. “If he lied. If he were not starting after all !” Christian divined her thought, and turning to Méraut said : “You will accompany me to the station, Samy will bring you back.” Then as time pressed, he hurried his adieux, said an amiable word to each, to Boscovich, to the Marquise, took Zara on his knee, spoke to him of the expedition that he was undertaking to reconquer his kingdom, bade him never be a subject

of grief to the queen, and if he should never see his father again, to remember that he had died for his country fulfilling his kingly duty. Quite a little speech in Louis XIV.'s style, really well turned, which the little prince listened to gravely, rather disconcerted at the solemn words issuing from the lips he had always seen smiling. But Christian was indeed the man of the present moment, changeable, and fickle beyond measure, and now full of his leavetaking, of the chances of the expedition, more moved than he wished to show, he hurriedly tore himself away from the emotion of the last minute. He waved an "Adieu ! adieu !" with his hand to all around, bowed low before the queen, and went out.

Truly, if Elysée Méraut had not known what had taken place in the royal household for the last three years, if he had not seen the profligacy and disgraceful weakness of Christian II., he would have found it difficult to recognize the Rigolo of the Grand Club, in the proud and heroic prince who explained to him his plans, his schemes, his intelligent and liberal political views as they rolled rapidly along in the direction of the Lyons station.

The royalist and somewhat superstitious faith of the tutor, saw in this a divine intervention, a privilege of caste, a king necessarily always returning to kingly sentiments at the supreme moment, by the grace of God and by the immutable laws of heredity ; and, without being able to explain to

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himself the reason, this moral regeneration of Christian, preceding and presaging the other that was nigh at hand, caused him an inexpressible feeling of discomfort, a haughty jealousy, the motives of which he would not analyse. While



Lebeau took the tickets and booked the luggage, they paced up and down in the great waiting-room, and in the solitude of this nightly departure, the king could not help thinking of Séphora, and the tender farewells at the Saint-Lazare station. Under the influence of these thoughts, a woman passed by and attracted his notice, the

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same figure, a touch of that staid but coquettish step.

Poor Christian, poor king in spite of himself !

At last he is in a carriage, of which Lebeau holds the door open for him, an ordinary first-class carriage, in order not to attract attention. He throws himself into a corner, anxious to get off, to have finished with it all. This slow process of tearing himself away is very painful to him. The engine whistles, the train begins to move, to draw out to its full length, darts noisily over the bridges, through the sleeping suburbs, dotted by long lines of lamps, and dashes off into the open country. Christian II. breathes again, he feels strong, safe, sheltered ; he could almost hum a tune if he were alone in his compartment. But over there at the opposite window, a little shadowy figure buried in black, shrinks back modestly in the corner, with the obvious intention of avoiding notice. It is a woman ; young, old, ugly, pretty ? The king, a matter of habit, casts a sidelong glance at her. Nothing stirs but the two little wings in the hat, which seem to turn back and fold together for sleep. "She sleeps. I will do the same." He stretches himself out on the seat, wraps himself up in a rug, looks out vaguely at the confused soft outlines of the trees and bushes, which seem to run one into the other as the train passes them ; at the signal posts ; the drifting clouds in the balmy sky ; and his eyelids heavy with sleep are about to close

when he feels on his cheek a caress of soft hair, of long eyelashes, of a violet-scented breath, and of two lips, murmuring close to his own lips : "Cruel man ! Leaving me without saying good bye !"

Ten hours later, Christian II. awoke to the roar



of cannon, in the dazzling light of a resplendent sun, softened by the surrounding verdure. He was just dreaming that at the head of his troops, under a storm of grape shot, he was scaling the rapid ascent leading from the port at Ragusa to the citadel. But he found himself lying motionless in a large bed, his eyes and brain confused, and his

whole being exhausted by a delicious languor. What had happened? Little by little he roused himself and remembered. He was at Fontainebleau, at the Hotel du Faisan, in front of the



forest, its close green summits rising up against the blue sky; the cannon was the sound of the artillery practice. And the living reality, the visible link of his ideas — Séphora — seated in front of a writing desk, such as is always to be found in an hotel but never anywhere else, was writing diligently with a bad, scratchy pen.

She saw in the mirror the admiring, grateful look of the king, and replied to it, without turning round or betraying the slightest emotion, by a tender glance of her eyes and a motion of her pen, then went on quietly writing, with a smile hovering at the corner of her seraphic mouth.

“A despatch I am sending home to reassure them,” she said, rising; and the telegram given, the waiter gone, relieved from some secret anxiety,


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she opened the window to the golden rays of the sun that poured into the room like the water from a sluice. "Oh dear! What beautiful weather." She came and sat down on the edge of the bed by the side of her lover. She laughed, delighted at the idea of finding herself in the country, of



rambling through the wood on such a lovely day. They had plenty of time till the night train that had brought them should pick up Christian the following night; for Lebeau, who had continued the journey, was to warn Hezeta and his companions that the landing was to be delayed for a day. The enamoured Slave would fain have remained indoors, and have drawn the great curtains over a happiness that he would willingly

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have prolonged to the last hour, the last minute. But women are gifted with more ideality, and directly breakfast was over, an open carriage carried them off through the magnificent avenues, bordered by lawns, and clumps of trees that give to the forest a look of some glade in the park at Versailles, before the rocks are reached that divide it into bold, wild sites. It was the first time they had gone out together, and Christian revelled in this brief joy, which was to have such a terrible morrow of battle and death.

They rolled on under immense arches of verdure, under the delicate foliage of the beech-trees spreading out light and motionless, the distant sun barely penetrating the dense greenery. Sheltered from all eyes, without any other horizon than the profile of the loved one, without any other hope, any other souvenir or desire but that of her caresses, the poetical side of the Slave's character overflowed. Oh ! to live there together all alone they two, in a keeper's tiny cottage, covered with thatch and mosses, and luxuriously furnished with every comfort ! Then he wanted to know how long she had loved him, what impression he had made on her the first time they had met. He translated for her the poetry and songs of his country, rhythmically showering kisses on her neck and on her eyes ; and she listened, pretended to understand and answer him, her eyelids, meanwhile, closing, heavy and sleepy after her broken night's rest.

The eternal discordance of love-duets ! Christian wished to plunge into the isolated, unexplored parts of the forest ; Séphora, on the contrary, sought out all the famous spots, the labelled curiosities of the forest, with the inevitable tea-gardens, booths full of carved juniper wood, and guides who show the rocking stones, the lightning-struck trees : a whole tribe of nondescripts, who dash out from huts or caverns at the least sound of a wheel. She hoped in this manner to escape from the wearisome and monotonous love-ditty ; and Christian admired the kindly patience with which she listened to the interminable stories of the worthy country folk, who always seem to have both time and space for all they do.

At Franchart, she insisted on drawing water from a renowned well of the old monks, so deep that the bucket is nearly twenty minutes coming up. Most entertaining for Christian ! There, a good woman covered with medals like an old dragoon, showed them the beauties of the place, the old ponds, on the banks of which the deer used to be cut up and served to the hounds ; having told the same story for so many years past in exactly the same words, she fancied she had herself lived in the convent, and, three hundred years later, had been present at the sumptuous picnics given under the First Empire when the court came to reside here : “ It was here, ladies and gentlemen, that the great Emperor sat in the

evening, surrounded by his court." She pointed to a stone bench in the midst of the heather. Then, in a proud tone, she added : "Opposite, the Empress with her ladies." There was something sinister in this evocation of imperial pomp in the midst of fallen rocks, distorted trunks of trees, and burnt-up broom. "Are you coming, Séphora ?" inquired Christian ; but Séphora was looking at an esplanade, where according to the *cicerone*, the little King of Rome used to be carried by his nurse, to kiss his hand from afar to his august parents. This vision of the child-prince reminded the King of Illyria of his little Zara. He seemed to stand up in front of him in the arid landscape, held aloft in Frédérique's arms, watching and gazing sadly at him, as though to ask what he was doing there. It was, however, but a vague reminder quickly repressed ; and they continued their stroll under the great fantastic oak-trees— hunting rendezvous, dubbed with high-sounding names—through the green vales, on the ledges that overlooked fallen masses of granite and sand-pits, where the pine-trees furrowed the red ground with their powerful projecting roots.

Now they followed a dark avenue of impenetrable shade, ploughed by deep, damp ruts. On each side rows of trees like the pillars of a cathedral formed silent naves, through which was heard only the step of a startled deer, or the fall of a golden-tinted leaf. An immense sadness fell from these

high archways, these branches without birds, resonant and hollow like deserted houses. As the day wore on the enamoured Christian felt his



passion deepened, with a shade of melancholy at the approaching separation. He told her how he had made his will before starting, and the emotion he had felt at writing when in the full vigour of life words that would only be read after his death.

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“Yes, it is very tiresome,” said Séphora, in the absent tone of a person thinking of something else. But he fancied himself so beloved, he was so accustomed to be loved, that he did not notice her abstraction. Indeed, he even consoled her beforehand in case anything should befall him, tracing out her existence for her : she must sell her house and retire into the country, and live on the recollection of their love. All this was delightfully conceited, naïve, and sincere : for he felt his heart seized with the sadness of farewells, which he mistook for the presentiment of death. In a low whisper, their hands entwined, he spoke of a future life. He wore round his neck a little medal of the Virgin, which never left him ; he took it off, and gave it to her. Fancy how delighted Séphora must have been !

Shortly after, they came upon an artillery camp, and the glimpse caught through the trees of rows of grey tents, light smoke, and horses unbridled, hobbled for the night, gave the king’s thoughts another direction. The moving hither and thither of uniforms, the fatigue parties, all the activity of life carried on in the open air in the warm light of the setting sun, the merry aspect of the soldier’s encampment, roused the instincts of his wandering and warlike race. The carriage, as it rolled over the green moss-covered avenue, aroused the attention of the soldiers occupied in pitching the tents or making their soup. They laughingly followed

the pretty couple with their eyes, and Christian longed to speak to them, to harangue them, as he examined the camp under the trees to its furthest extremity. A bugle sounded, and others answered from afar. Before an officer's tent, a little aside from the others, on rising ground, a beautiful Arab horse, with nostrils open and flowing mane, pranced and neighed at the sound of the bugles. The Slave's eyes sparkled. Ah! what grand days were now before him! What mighty sword-thrusts he would give! But what a pity Lebeau had gone on to Marseilles with his luggage; he would have been so proud to show himself to her in his uniform of lieutenant-general. And in his excited imagination he saw the gates of the town forced open, the republicans routed, his own triumphant entrance into Leybach through the gaily-decked streets. She should be there, by Gad! He would have her there, and give her a superb palace at the gates of the town. They would continue to see each other as freely as in Paris. To all these wonderful plans Séphora did not answer much. No doubt she would have preferred to keep him all to herself; and Christian admired her silent abnegation, which so well befitted her position as mistress of the king.

Ah! how he loved her, and how quickly that evening passed at the Hotel du Faisan, in their crimson-hung room, with the great curtains drawn upon the fading light of a summer's evening; in

the little, sparsely-lit town, buzzing with the hum of the conversations before the doors and of the passers-by, dispersing at the sound of the drums and bugles of the garrison. How many kisses, and follies, and passionate vows went to rejoin the kisses and vows exchanged the previous night. In their delicious languor and their close embrace they listened to the quick beating of their own hearts ; while a soft breeze shook the curtains after having murmured in the trees, and a fountain played, like in a Moorish court, in the middle of the little garden of the hotel, where the only light was the red and flickering reflection of the office lamp.

One o'clock ! It is the hour of parting. Christian dreaded the wrench of the last moment for he thought he would have to struggle against the caresses and prayers of Séphora, and would have to summon up all his courage.

But she was ready before he was, and insisted on accompanying him to the station, placing the honour of her royal lover before his love. If he could have heard the sigh of relief the cruel creature gave, when, alone on the platform, she watched the two green eyes of the train winding away in the distance ; if he could have known how happy she was at the idea of finding herself alone in the hotel ; while as the empty omnibus rattled her over the old pavement of Fontainebleau, she said to herself in a quiet tone free from all thrill of



passion: "If only Tom has done the needful in time!"

Yes, most assuredly the needful had been done, for when the train reached Marseilles, great was the surprise of Christian II. when he alighted from the railway carriage with his little portmanteau in his hand, to see a flat silver-braided cap approach him and very politely beg him to step for one moment into his office.

"What for? Who are you?" asked the king, haughtily.

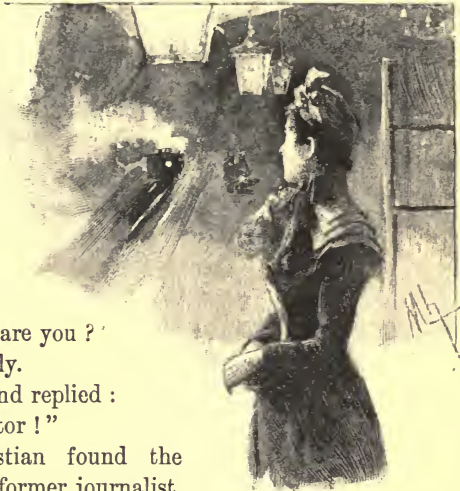
The flat cap bowed and replied:

"Government inspector!"

In the office, Christian found the prefect of Marseilles, a former journalist, with a red beard and bright and witty countenance.

"I am sorry to have to inform your Majesty that your journey must end here," said he in a tone of exquisite politeness. "My Government cannot allow a prince to take advantage of the hospitality afforded to him by France, to conspire and arm against a friendly power."

The king tried to protest, but the prefect was



acquainted with the minutest details of the expedition.

“You were to embark at Marseilles, and your companions at Cette on a Jersey steamer. The place chosen for the general landing was the shore of Gravosa, the signal two rockets, one from the ship the other on land. You see we are well informed. They are the same at Ragusa, and I am saving you from a regular trap.”

Christian II. was astounded, and wondered who could have betrayed secrets known only to himself, to the queen, to Hezeta, and one other, whom he certainly did not dream of suspecting. The prefect smiled in his fair beard.

“Come, Monseigneur, you must make the best of it, you have failed this time. On the next occasion you will be more fortunate and more prudent also. Now I beg your Majesty will accept the shelter of the *préfecture*. Anywhere else you would be the object of a troublesome curiosity, for your projected expedition is known all over the town.”

Christian did not answer immediately. He looked around the little official room, filled by a green armchair, green portfolios, an earthenware stove, and great maps marked with the lines of railway, the miserable corner in which his heroic dream, and the last echoes of the March of Rodoïtza lay stranded. He was like a traveller in a balloon, who, having started for dizzy heights,

had fallen down at once upon a peasant's hut, with his empty balloon, a mere bundle of crumpled silk, cast aside under a stable roof.

He, however accepted the invitation, and found

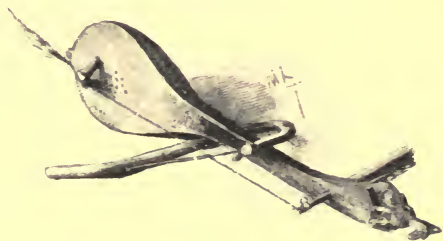


the prefect's home a truly Parisian one ; his wife a charming woman and a thorough musician, who after dinner, when they had talked over all the topics of the day, seated herself at the piano, and ran through the newest opera. She had a pretty voice and knew how to sing ; so after a while

Christian drew near her and discussed music and operas. The *Echoes of Illyria* were lying on the music-stand between the *Reine de Saba* and the *Jolie Parfumeuse*. The lady asked the king to show her the rhythm and style of the ballads of his country. And Christian II. hummed one or two popular airs : “*Beaux yeux, bleus comme un ciel d’été,*” \* and again : “*Jeunes filles qui m’écoutez en tressant des nattes.*”

And while this captivating king stood leaning against the piano affecting the melancholy tones and attitudes of an exile ; far away, on the Illyrian Sea, of whose foam-tipped waves and flowered shore the *Echoes* sang, a troop of young and enthusiastic men, whom Lebeau had calmly neglected to warn, scudded joyously towards the fatal shores, into the very jaws of death, to the cry of : “ Long live Christian II. ! ”

\* “ Beautiful eyes, blue as a summer’s sky.” “ Young maidens who hearken to my song while weaving mats.”





### XIII.

#### THE CONDEMNED CELL.

“ My darling wife, we have just been brought back to the citadel of Ragusa, Monsieur de Hezeta and I, after ten hours passed in the theatre of the Corso, where a court-martial has been sitting upon us. We have been unanimously condemned to death.

“ I confess that I prefer this. At least we now know what to expect, and are no longer in solitary confinement. I can read your dear letters and can write to you. The complete silence utterly crushed me. I was without any news of you, of my father, of the king whom I fancied killed, the

victim of some ambush. Fortunately His Majesty is spared, and has but the failure of the expedition and the lives of a few loyal servants to deplore. Things might have been worse.

“The newspapers, no doubt, have told you what took place. Owing to some incredible fatality, the king’s counter-order had not reached us, and at seven o’clock in the evening we were to leeward of the islands at the appointed rendezvous. Hezeta and I were on deck, the others in the cabin, all armed and ready, your pretty little cockade stuck in our hats. We cruised about for two or three hours. There was nothing within sight but some fishing smacks and some big feluccas belonging to the coasting trade. Night fell, and with it a sea-fog, adding to the difficulties of our meeting with Christian II. After waiting about a long time, we came to the conclusion that his Majesty’s steamer had probably passed by without seeing us, and that the king had landed. Just then, from the shore where they were to await our signal, a rocket was fired into the air. That meant: ‘Land at once.’ We had no more doubts, the king was evidently there. And we started to join him.

“As I am thoroughly acquainted with the country—I have so often shot wild-duck in that neighbourhood—I was put in command of the first launch, Hezeta was in the second, and Monsieur de Miremont was in the third with our Parisian adherents. In my boat we were all Illyrians, and

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how our hearts beat high. It was our motherland that lay before us, that dark coast rising through the fog, bearing the little red revolving light of the Gravosa lighthouse. The complete silence on the beach, however, astonished me. Nothing was to be heard but the waves breaking on the shore, a long rippling, clapping sound, nothing of that mysterious sound that arises from the most silent crowd, that always resembles a clink of arms, or the panting of subdued respirations.

“‘I see our men!’ said San-Giorgio in a whisper to me.

“We perceived on landing that what we had taken for the king’s volunteers were clumps of cactus, and Barbary fig-trees planted in rows on the beach. I advanced. Nobody. But there were the footmarks of a trampling crowd, and furrows in the sand. I said to the Marquis: ‘This looks very suspicious. Let us get back to the boats.’

“Unfortunately, the Parisians had just landed; you know how impossible it is to hold them. They scattered themselves all along the shore, beating the bushes and thickets. All at once there was a line of fire, the cracking of musketry. The cry is raised: ‘Treason! treason! To the boats!’ We rush towards the launches; jostling, and hustling like a herd of mad, bewildered cattle, through sand and water. There was a moment of terrible panic when the moon shone out and showed us the sailors

pulling away as hard as they could to the steamer. However, that did not last long. Hezeta dashed forward, revolver in hand. '*Avanti! Avanti!*' What a voice! The whole shore echoed again with the sound. We followed on his heels. Fifty against a whole army. We had but to die. And that is what our men did with true courage. Pozzo, Mélida, young Soris your admirer of last winter, Henri de Trébigne who in the midst of the scuffle, called out to me: 'I say, Herbert, this lacks *guzlas!*' And Jean de Véliko, who, while he slashed right and left sang the '*Rodoïtza*' at the top of his voice; all fell, and I saw them stretched out on the sand, their faces turned towards the heavens. It is there that the rising tide will have engulfed and shrouded them, the gay dancers of our last ball! Less fortunate than our comrades, the marquis and I alone survived that hailstorm of bullets; we were seized, bound, fastened on to mules' backs and carried to Ragusa, your unhappy Herbert howling with impotent rage, while Hezeta calmly repeated: 'It was fated. I knew this would happen.' What a strange fellow! How could he know that we should be betrayed, abandoned to our enemies, and on landing be received by musket and grapeshot; and if he did know it, why did he lead us on? However, the result is the same, the thing is a failure, and when another attempt is made, greater precautions must be taken.

"I understand now, by your dear letters that I

never tire of reading and re-reading, why our trial has been put off for so long, and the meaning of all the going and coming of the lawyers' gowns through the citadel, the haggling over our lives, all the ups and downs, all the delay. The wretches were treating us like hostages in hopes that the king, who refused to renounce the throne for millions, would give way when the lives of two of his faithful servants were at stake. Blinded by your affection, you are surprised and exasperated, my darling, that my father refused to say a word to save his son.



A Rosen could not betray such weakness! He loves me no less dearly, poor old man, and my death will be a terrible blow to him. As for our sovereigns, whom you accuse of cruelty, we must not judge them: we have not the same high standpoint they have, which enables them to govern men. They have duties and rights beyond those of the common herd. Ah! how eloquently Méraut would discourse on this theme. As for me, I feel all these things but am unable to express them; the words stick in my throat. I do not know how to bring them out; my jaws are too

heavy. How often have I felt this difficulty with you, whom I love so tenderly, and to whom I have never known how to tell it! Even here, when I am separated from you by hundreds of miles and such thick iron bars, the thought of your pretty grey eyes, your arch smile, and your little nose turned up in laughing mockery, intimidates and paralyses me.

“And yet, before leaving you for ever, I must try and make you understand, once for all, that I have never loved anybody in the world but you, and that my life only began from the day I first met you. Do you remember, Colette? It was at the agency Rue Royale; at that fellow, Tom Levis’. We were supposed to be there by chance. You tried a piano; you played, sang something very lively that, without knowing why, almost made me weep. I was caught! Who would have thought it? A marriage made through a matrimonial agency become a love match! And since that I have never, never met, either in or out of society, a woman half as charming as my Colette. You may rest easy, you have always been present in my heart, even when absent from me; the very thought of your pretty little face kept me happy. I laughed alone as I recalled it. It is true, your image is always associated with the joyousness of laughter. At this moment our situation is terrible, and nothing has been spared to increase its horror. Hezeta and myself are *en chapelle*, that is to say, in

the little cell with its whitewashed walls an altar has been prepared for our last mass, a coffin has been placed in front of each bed, and on the walls are hung cards inscribed with the words 'Dead—Dead.' Well, notwithstanding all this, the room seems to me very cheerful. I take refuge from these gloomy threats by thinking of my Colette; and when I raise myself up to our grated window, the sight of this lovely country, the road that leads down from Ragusa to Gravosa, the aloes, the cactus rising against the blue sky and sea, all recalls to me our wedding trip, the Corniche road between Monaco and Monte-Carlo, and the tinkle of the mule bells bearing along our happy love, joyous and light-hearted as those bells. Oh! my dear little wife, how pretty you were, how I should have wished the journey through life to have lasted longer with such a companion!

"You see that your image remains triumphant, even on the threshold of death, even in death itself; for it will be on my heart as a scapulary, over there at the Porte de Mer, where in a few hours we are to be taken; and it will enable me to meet death with a smile. Therefore my loved one, do not grieve too much. Think of the little one, the child who will soon be born. Keep yourself for him, and when he is at an age to understand, tell him that I died like a soldier, erect, with two names on my lips: my wife and my king.

"I should have wished to leave you a souvenir

of this last moment, but I have been robbed of every jewel, watch, wedding-ring, and pin. I have nothing left but a pair of white gloves that I meant to wear on our entry at Ragusa. I shall put them on presently to do honour to my execution ; and the chaplain of the prison has faithfully promised me to send them to you when all is over.

“And now, farewell, my darling Colette. Do not weep. I tell you not to weep, and my tears are blinding me. Comfort my father. Poor old man ! He who so often scolded me for coming late for the orders of the day. Well, I shall never come again now. Farewell, farewell ! And yet I had so much more to say to you. But no, I must die. Alas ! Cruel destiny. Colette, good-bye !

“HERBERT DE ROSEN.”





XIV.

THE ABDICATION.

“THERE is still one course left open to you, Sire.”

“Speak, my dear Méraut. I am ready to make any sacrifice.”

Méraut hesitated. What he was about to say seemed to him too serious a matter to be discussed in the billiard-room, whither the king had brought him to play a game after breakfast. But the strange irony that presides over the destiny of dethroned sovereigns required that the fate of the royal race of Illyria should be decided there, before

the green cloth on which the balls rolled with a hollow and sinister sound amid the silence and mourning of the Saint-Mandé establishment.

“Well? What is it?” asked Christian II., stretching himself over the table to strike the ball.

“Well, Monseigneur,” replied Elysée, and he paused till the king had made his cannon, till Councillor Boscovich had piously marked it, and then continued in a slightly embarrassed tone :

“The people of Illyria are like other peoples, Sire. They admire success and power, and I fear lest the fatal issue of our last enterprise——”

The king turned round, his cheeks aglow.

“I asked you for the plain truth, my dear Méraut, do not try to disguise it.”

“Sire, you must abdicate,” said the Gascon, bluntly.

Christian stared at him with astonishment.

“Abdicate what?” he said. “I have nothing left. A fine present to make to my son. I think he would prefer a new bicycle to the vague promise of this crown at his majority.”

Méraut quoted the precedent of the Queen of Galicia. She too had abdicated in favour of her son during her exile, and if Don Léonce was on the throne now, it was owing to that abdication.

“Eighteen to twelve!” said Christian, sharply. “Councillor, you are not marking.”

Boscovich bounded like a startled hare, and

rushed up to the board, while the king, his whole body and mind intent on a difficult stroke, appeared absorbed in his play. Elysée watched him, and his royalist faith was put to a rude test as he looked at this specimen of the used-up dandy, this inglorious victim—his thin long neck displayed by the wide-open collar of his flannel shirt, his eyes, mouth, and nostrils still tinged with the jaundice that he had but just recovered from, and which had kept him for about a month in bed. The disaster at Gravosa, the terrible death of all those young men, the fearful scenes the trial of Herbert and Hezeta had given rise to at Saint-Mandé; Colette dragging herself on her knees before her former lover to obtain her husband's life; the days of anguish and dread expectation, in which he was ever haunted by the sound of the platoon firing, for which he seemed himself to give the word of command; and added to this, money cares, Pichery's bills coming to maturity; the restlessness of his evil destiny, all this without being able to overcome the careless indifference of the Slave, had nevertheless physically prostrated him.

He stopped after making a cannon, and chalking his cue most carefully, asked Méraut, without looking at him:

“What does the queen say about this plan of abdication? Have you mentioned it to her?”

“The queen is of my opinion, Sire.”

“ Ah ! ” he said drily, with a slight stare.

Strange inconsistency of human nature ! He did not love this woman, whose cold distrust and sharp glance he feared ; this woman whom he reproached with having treated him too much as a king, and wearied to death by her continual reminders of duty and prerogatives, and yet he was indignant now at the idea that she no longer believed in him, at her abandonment of him for the benefit of the child. He felt—not a blow to his love, not one of those stabs at the heart that make it cry out, but the chill of a treacherous thrust on the part of a friend, of confidence lost.

“ And you, Boscovich, what do you think of it ? ” he suddenly asked, as he turned to his councillor, whose smooth anxious face reflected convulsively the various phases of his master’s countenance.

The botanist made a slight pantomimic gesture expressing doubt, his arms wide open, his head sunk between his shoulders, a mute “ *Chi lo sa ?* ” so timid, so little compromising, that the king could not help laughing.

“ With the advice of our council,” he said scoffingly, in his nasal tones, “ we will abdicate whenever we are requested to do so.”

Whereupon His Majesty returned with greater eagerness than ever to his billiards, to Elysée’s intense despair, who was dying to go and inform the queen of the success of a negotiation she had

not ventured upon herself, for this shadow of royalty still overawed her, and it was with a trembling hand that she dared take up this crown he refused to wear.

The abdication took place a short time after. Stoically the chief of the civil and military household proposed that the ceremony, which is usually surrounded with as much solemnity and authenticity as possible, should take place in the splendid galleries of the Rosen mansion. But the catastrophe of Gravosa was too recent for these reception halls, still re-echoing with the music of the last ball ; it would have been too sad and evil an omen for the new reign. It was therefore resolved to invite to Saint-Mandé the few noble Illyrian or French families whose signatures were necessary at the foot of such an important document.

At two o'clock the carriages began to arrive, the rings at the bell succeeded each other, while on the long carpets rolled from the door to the bottom of the stairs the guests slowly ascended, and were received at the entrance of the drawing-room by the Duc de Rosen, tightly buttoned up in his general's uniform, wearing all his decorations, and around his neck the broad ribbon of Illyria, which he had laid aside without a word, when he had learned that the barber Biscarat wore the same insignia as himself over his Figaro's vest. Around his arm and on his sword hilt the general wore a

fresh crape bow, and what was still more significant than the crape, was the senile shake of his head, a sort of unconscious protest, "no, no," which he had kept ever since the terrible debate that had taken place in his presence with regard to Herbert's reprieve, a debate in which he had energetically refused to take part, notwithstanding Colette's entreaties and the revolt of his paternal love. It seemed as though his little, shaky, hawk-like skull paid the penalty of his inhuman refusal, and was condemned henceforth to say no to every impression, every sentiment, even to life itself; for nothing more now could ever interest him, nothing exist for him after the tragical end of his son.

Princess Colette was also there, wearing a fashionable mourning that became her fair hair, her widowhood somewhat consoled by the hope apparent in her slower gait and heavier appearance. Even in the midst of her sincere grief, her little frivolous mind, ever taken up with trifles, and which the cruelty of fate had not modified, was still occupied with a variety of coquetish trifles for her child if not for herself. The ribbons, laces, and magnificent trousseau she was having made for her infant and embroidered with an original monogram under her coronet, mitigated her sorrow. The baby should be called Wenceslas or Witold, Wilhelmine if it were a girl, but certainly its name should begin with a W., because it was

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an aristocratic letter and looked pretty embroidered on linen. She was explaining her ideas on the subject to Madame de Silvis, when the doors were thrown open, and preceded by a blow of the halberd on the floor, the names of the guests were called out : the Princes and Princesses de Trébigne and de Soris, the Duc de San-Giorgio, the Duchesse de Mélida, the Comtes Pozzo, de Miremont, de Véliko, etc. It sounded like the death roll, re-echoed from the bloody strand, of all those youthful victims fallen at Gravosa. And what lent a terrible, fatal, and funereal aspect to the ceremony, notwithstanding all the precautions taken, the sumptuous liveries and the state hangings, was that all the new comers were in deep mourning, dressed and gloved in black, smothered in those woollen materials that impart such a dreary look, seeming to place a restraint upon the women's gait and gestures, the mourning of old people, fathers and mothers, sadder, more heartrending, and more unjust than any other mourning. Many of these unhappy creatures had come out to-day for the first time since the catastrophe, drawn from their solitude and seclusion by their devotion to the dynasty. They straightened themselves as they entered, summoning up all their courage ; but as they gazed at one another, sinister reflections of the same grief, with bowed heads and quivering shoulders, they felt their eyes fill with the tears

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that welled in those of the others, while to their lips rose the sighs that were so painfully restrained at their side ; soon the nervous tension became contagious, and the room was filled with a long, broken sigh, a stifled exclamation of grief. Old Rosen alone did not weep, erect and inflexible he continued to shake his head, as though saying :

“ No, no. He must die ! ”

That evening, at the Café de Londres, H.R.H. the Prince d'Axel, who had been invited to sign the abdication, related that he might have fancied he was attending a first-class funeral, all the family assembled and waiting for the corpse to be taken away. In truth the royal prince cut a sorry figure when he made his entrance there. He felt chilled, embarrassed by the silence and despair, and looked with terror at all those old women, till he caught sight of the little Princesse de Rosen. He quickly went and sat near her, curious to know the heroine of that famous breakfast of the Quai d'Orsay ; and while Colette, at heart very much flattered by his attention, received His Highness with a sad and sentimental smile, she little suspected how those dull lifeless eyes bent on her, were considering the exact fit of the little pastry-cook costume moulding her inviting little person.

“ Gentlemen, the king ! ”

Christian II., very pale and careworn, walked in first, holding his son by the hand. The little

prince had a befitting air of gravity which suited him well, heightened by the black jacket and trousers which he wore for the first time with the pride and serious gracefulness of a youth. The queen followed, looking very handsome in a magnificent mauve dress covered with lace, too sincere to be able to conceal her joy, which contrasted with the surrounding sadness, as the bright colour of her dress with that of the mourning garments around her. She was so happy, so egotistically happy, that she had not a look of sympathy for the sublime affliction which encompassed her, any more than she noticed the desolation of the garden, the moisture on the window-panes, and the sombre November fog, floating under the dark and lowering sky, full of misty torpor. For her this gloomy day was to remain in her memory warm and luminous. So true is it that all lies within us, and that the exterior world is transformed for us by our own impressions, and assumes the colour that our passions lend it.

Christian II. placed himself in front of the fire place in the centre of the drawing-room, with the Comte de Zara on his right and the queen on his left; a little further off Boscovich, in his ermine cloak as Aulic Councillor, was seated at a small writing-table. When each one had taken his place, the king, in a low voice, announced himself ready to sign his abdication and give his motives for so doing

to his subjects. Upon which Boscovich rose, and in his little, weak, indistinct voice read Christian's manifesto to the nation, the brief history written in broad lines, of the expectations of the first years of his reign, of the disappointments, the misunderstandings that had followed, and finally the king's resolution to retire from public affairs, and confide his son to the generosity of the Illyrian people.

This short letter, in which the hand of Elysée Méraut was visible in every line, was read so badly, and sounded so much like a tiresome botanical nomenclature, that it allowed full time for reflection, and for the hearers to see all that was vain and derisive in this abdication of an exiled prince, this transmission of a power that did not exist, of rights that were disowned and unheeded. The document itself which was read by the king ran as follows :--

“ I, Christian II., King of Illyria and Dalmatia, Grand Duke of Bosnia and Herzegovina, etc., etc., hereby declare that of my own free will, and not yielding to any foreign pressure whatever, I leave and transfer to my son Charles-Alexis-Leopold, Count of Goetz and Zara, all my political rights, reserving only my civil rights as his father and guardian.”

Then at a sign from Rosen, all those present approached the table and signed. For a few minutes only a sound of shuffling of feet and

rustling of dresses was heard, and the scratching of trembling or heavy pens, with pauses every now and again necessitated by the ceremonial. Then the ceremony of kissing hands began.

Christian II. opened the ball, and acquitted himself of his delicate task—the homage of a father to his son—with more sprightly grace than respect. The queen on the contrary kissed her child's frail hand with a passionate, almost reverential effusion ; the protecting mother had become the humble subject. Now Prince d'Axel's turn came, and that of the noble lords, who came forward in an order of precedence which the little king soon found very tedious ; but he maintained a charming air of dignity in his candid eyes as he held out his little white transparent hand, the square nails and disproportioned wrist of which betrayed the child whose playing days are not yet over. Notwithstanding the gravity of the occasion and the sinister preoccupation of their mourning hearts, all these nobles were still full of the importance of their rank, and jealously guarded their rights of precedence, which were measured according to their titles and their dignities ; and when Méraut made an attempt in his enthusiasm to rush up to his pupil, he found himself stopped by a stern, “By your leave, sir !” which made him step back and find himself face to face with the indignant Prince of Trébigne, a terribly asthmatic old fellow, who

breathlessly opened his eyes like round balls, as if he were trying to breathe through them. Elysée, ever respectful of tradition, deferentially gave way before this remnant of the past, and came up the



last to kiss hands. As he was retiring, Frédérique, standing beside her son, like the mother of a young bride, who in the vestry receives her share of the surrounding homages and smiles, said in a low but exultant tone :

“’Tis done !”

There was in her intonation an unutterable

relief and a fulness of joy that was almost ferocious.

“’Tis done !” That is to say the diadem was henceforth safe, beyond the reach of traffic and contamination. Now she could sleep, breathe, live free from the terrible apprehensions which seemed to warn her in advance of the approaching catastrophes, and would have enabled her to say like Hezeta after each fatal dénouement, “I knew it.” Her son would not be despoiled, her son would be king. What ! was he not king already by his majestic attitude, his affable and condescending kindness.

However, as soon as the ceremony was over, the child’s nature asserted itself, and Leopold V. darted joyfully towards old Jean de Véliko to announce his great news : “You know, godfather, I have got a pony, a dear little pony, all to myself. The general is going to teach me to ride, and mamma also.” All eagerly flocked around the child, and bent upon him looks of adoration ; while Christian, somewhat lonely and deserted, felt a strange, indefinable impression, as though his brow were lightened, as if the removal of his crown left a chill. He actually felt light-headed. And yet he had longed for this hour, he had cursed the responsibilities of his position. Then what was the meaning of this uneasiness, this depression, now that he saw the shore recede, and new perspectives open before him ?

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“ Well, my poor Christian, I am afraid you have received your marmoset.”

This was Prince d’Axel’s whispered consolation.

“ You are a lucky dog, indeed ! Would not I be happy if the same lot fell to me ; if I could be exempted from the obligation of leaving this charming Paris to go and reign over my people, a set of white-stomached seals ! ”

He went on for a moment in the same tone ; then, taking advantage of the tumult and inattention of the assembly, they both disappeared: The queen saw them go out, she heard the sound of the phæton wheels as they rolled away, those light wheels she had never heard before without a pang. But what matter now ? It was no longer the King of Illyria those women of Paris were leading astray.

After Gravosa, in the first moment of his shame, Christian had sworn he would never again see Séphora. As long as he was in bed, with the dread of illness so common to the Southerner, he never thought of his mistress but to curse her, and inwardly accuse her of all his faults ; but when he became convalescent, and his blood flowed more freely through his veins, his recollections, mingling with his dreams during his enforced idleness, changed the course of his ideas. He first began to

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excuse the woman, timidly ; and then only saw in what had happened a fatality, one of the thousand designs of Providence, on whom true Catholics throw the whole burden of responsibility.

One day, at last, he ventured to ask Lebeau if no letters had come from the Comtesse. The valet answered by bringing him a quantity of little notes which had arrived during his illness ; tender, passionate, timid notes ; a shower of white turtle-doves cooing love.

Christian's heart was aglow in a moment ; he answered at once from his bed, longing to resume the romance interrupted at Fontainebleau.

Meantime, J. Tom Levis and his wife were enjoying themselves in their mansion, Avenue de Messine. The foreigners' agent had not been able to endure the dulness of Courbevoie. He missed the bustle of business, of traffic, and, above all, the admiration of Séphora.

Moreover, he was jealous,—a stupid, obstinate, throbbing jealousy that stuck like a fish-bone in his throat. He fancied it gone, and yet felt the prick ; and not a person to whom he could complain and say : “Just look at what I have here sticking in my throat.” Unfortunate Tom Levis, caught in his own trap, inventor and victim of his Grand Stroke ! Séphora's journey to Fontainebleau caused him the most uneasiness. On several occasions he tried to lead her to the subject, but she would

always stop him with such a natural burst of laughter : " What is the matter with you, my poor Tom ? How funny you look ! " Then he was forced to laugh also, for he knew that between them there could be no deep feeling, only fun and nonsense, and that Séphora's fancy for him, the fancy of a circus girl for a clown, would quickly cease if she thought him jealous and sentimental—a plague like the rest.

In reality he suffered at being away from her, and went so far as to write verses. Yes, the man of the cab, the imaginative Narcisse, had discovered this solace for his anxieties, a poem to Séphora, one of those queer lucubrations, scanned with pretentious ignorance, such as are often found at Mazas on the table of a prisoner. Truly, if Christian II. had not fallen ill, Tom Levis would have done so.

The joy of the clown and his love at spending these few weeks together, may be imagined. Tom danced his most fantastic jigs, and stood on his head on the carpets. He was like a monkey in a good humour : like Auriol the clown, let loose in the house. Séphora writhed with laughter, though made somewhat uncomfortable by the servant's hall, where " the husband of Madame " was decidedly disapproved of. The butler had indeed declared that if " the husband of Madame " ate at table, he would decline to serve him ; and as he was

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quite an exceptional servant, given and chosen by the king, she did not press the point, but had the meals brought up to her boudoir by a housemaid. When she received a visitor—Wattelet, or the Prince d'Axel for instance—J. Tom would disappear and hide himself in a dressing-room. Never did a husband find himself more strangely situated ; but he adored his wife, and had her all to himself in a setting that made her appear ten times prettier in his eyes. In short he was the happiest of the whole set, for the constant delays and evasion were beginning to cause much disquietude amongst them.

Each one felt a knot, a hitch in this affair that had been so well started. The king never paid the bills that fell due, but on the contrary kept drawing fresh ones, to the dismay of Pichery and father Leemans. Lebeau endeavoured to keep up their courage: "Patience, have patience ; we shall succeed, it is a dead certainty." But he was not out of pocket, while the others had piles of reams of Illyrian paper in their desks. The poor "father," who had lost a great deal of his confidence, would come every morning to the Avenue de Messine in search of reassuring words from his daughter and son-in-law.

"Then you still think we shall succeed?" and he went on discounting bills, again and again, since the only way to recover his money, was to throw more after it.

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One afternoon, the Comtesse was getting ready for a drive in the Bois ; tripping from her room to her dressing-room under the paternal eye of J. Tom, who lounging on a sofa, cigar in mouth and thumbs in armholes, enjoyed the pretty spectacle of a lovely woman dressing, putting on her gloves before her mirror, and studying her attitudes. She was bewitching in her pretty autumnal dress and her hat, with the veil stopping short just below her eyes, while the jingle of her bracelet, the sparkle of the jet trimming on her cloak, harmonised with the appearance of the carriage waiting under the windows, with the click of the harness and the pawing of the horses, the whole forming part and parcel of the King of Illyria's establishment.

She was going out with Tom for a drive round the lake, taking advantage of a fine day in the already advanced season, under the low sky which brings into relief the new fashions, and the faces refreshed by a long stay in the country or seaside.

Tom, elegantly dressed in English fashion, was charmed at the prospect of this drive in the close luxurious brougham, half-hidden by his pretty Comtesse, like a pair of lovers.

Madame is ready, they are about to start, after a last loving look cast at the mirror, when suddenly the hall door opens, the bell rings hurriedly : "The king !" And while the husband dashes into the dressing-room, with his eyes rolling savagely,

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Séphora runs to the window just in time to see Christian II. coming up the stone steps with a conquering air. He soars, he has wings. "How happy she is going to be!" he says to himself as he rapidly enters the house.

The fair one guesses that something has happened, and prepares to receive the news. To begin with, she utters a cry of joyful surprise on seeing him, falls into his arms and allows herself to be carried to an armchair, in front of which he falls down on his knees and exclaims: "Yes, it is I, it is I, for ever yours!"

She gazes at him with wide open eyes, frantic with love and hope. And he, bathed, drowned in her glance, says:

"The deed is done. It is no longer the King of Illyria who loves you, but a man who will give up his whole life to you!"

"Ah! this is too much happiness! I dare not believe it."

"Look, read!"

She took the parchment, and slowly unfolded it.

"Then it is true, my Christian, you have renounced——"

"I have done more than that."

And while she perused the deed, he stood twirling his moustache, and looked at Séphora with an air of triumph; then, finding that she did not understand fast enough, he explained to her the

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difference between a renunciation and an abdication,—that he would be just as free from his duties and responsibilities, without in any way comprising his son's future. It is true, the money—but they did not require so many millions to be happy.

She stopped reading, and listened to him with lips apart, her pretty teeth showing in an acrid smile, as though to seize what he was telling her. She had understood, however ; oh yes, indeed ; she saw at a glance the ruin of their ambition, the total loss of all the piles of gold invested in the affair ; the rage of Leemans, of Pichery, of all the set : robbed by the wrong manœuvre of this fool. She thought of all the useless sacrifices, of the six months of dreary *ennui* she had undergone, made up of sickening dissimulation and mawkishness ; of her poor Tom, even now holding his breath in the dressing-room, while that other fellow in front of her awaited an explosion of tender feeling on her part, certain of being loved,—an irresistible, overpowering conqueror. The situation struck her as absurd : the irony was so complete, so absolute. She rose, seized with a fit of uncontrollable laughter—an insulting and scornful laugh, which brought to her cheeks a transient red, all the dregs of her coarse nature stirred up ; and passing before Christian, who remained stupefied : “ You fool ! ” she cried out to him, as she



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dashed into her room and drew all the bolts behind her.

Without a penny, without a crown, without a wife or a mistress, he looked indeed a pitiful object as he went down the stairs.





## XV.

### THE LITTLE KING.

OH, the magic of words! No sooner had Méraut's pupil exchanged the name of Comte de Zara for that of Leopold V. than a complete transformation took place in him, as if the four letters of the word *king* possessed a cabalistic power. The painstaking, attentive child, tractable and ready to receive any impress, without, however, showing any superiority of intelligence, seemed suddenly to shake off all drowsiness, to be roused

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by some singular mental excitement; his body even appearing to gain strength from the interior flame that quickened him. His natural indolence, his lazy habit of lying about on sofas and chairs while he was read to, or while stories were related to him; that craving for other people's thoughts, to which he idly listened, was changed into an activity that the mere games of his age failed to satisfy. The old General de Rosen, crippled with rheumatism, had to summon up all his strength to give him his first lessons in fencing, shooting, and riding; and it was a touching sight, every morning at nine o'clock, to see the former Pandour, dressed in a blue coat, whip in hand, standing in the middle of an open space transformed into a lunging-ring, and with the manners of an old Franconi respectfully, but persistently, correct his pupil's errors, and perform all the duties of a riding-master. Little Leopold trotted and galloped, proud and serious, attentive to the smallest observation; while the queen looked on from the top of the stone steps, occasionally throwing in a word of advice: "Hold yourself straight, Sire. Slacken the reins." And sometimes, in order to be more quickly understood, the mother—herself a splendid horsewoman—would run down and join example to precept. How happy she was the first day they rode out together, regulating her mare's step or that of the prince's pony; they went as far as the neighbouring wood, the child's figure overshadowed

by the mother's, who, ignoring any maternal fears, urged on the animals at full speed, and galloped off with her son till they reached Joinville ! She, too, had undergone a great change since the abdication. In the eyes of this superstitious believer in divine right, the title of king henceforth protected and defended the child. Her tenderness, strong and deep as ever, no longer manifested itself outwardly, or in affectionate caresses ; and if in the evening she still entered his room, it was no longer to "see Zara put to bed," nor to tuck him up. A valet now attended to all this, as though Frédérique feared to make her son effeminate and retard his manliness by keeping him too much under her gentle care. She only came to hear him repeat the beautiful prayer, taken from "The Book of Kings," that Father Alphée had taught him :

*"O Lord, my God, Thou hast placed Thy servant on the throne ; but I am only a child, knowing not how to guide myself, and charged with the guidance of the people Thou hast given unto me. Vouchsafe to me, O Lord, the necessary wisdom and intelligence. . . ."*

The small voice of the prince would rise clear and firm, with a tinge of authority and conviction, which, in his present state of exile, in the corner of a suburb far away from the problematic throne beyond the seas, was most touching. But in the eyes of Frédérique, her Leopold reigned already,

and she threw into her evening kiss a proud subjection, an indefinable respect and adoration, that reminded Elysée, when by chance he observed this strange mixture of maternal feelings, of the old carols of his country, in which the Virgin sings, as she rocks Jesus in the stable: "*I am Thy servant, and Thou art my God.*"

Several months passed in this way, indeed the whole winter, during which the queen felt only one shadow pass over the serenity of her life. And it was Méraut who unconsciously was the cause. Dreaming ever the same dream, mingling their onward glances and aspirations, walking together closely united towards the same goal, a certain familiarity and community of thought and life had arisen, which suddenly gave to Frédérique, without well knowing why, a sense of uneasiness. When she found herself alone with him she was embarrassed, and startled at the influence this stranger had acquired over her most private decisions. Did she divine the feelings that agitated him? the passion smouldering so close to her? which each day became more absorbing and more dangerous. A woman is seldom mistaken in such matters. She would have wished to protect herself, to regain her impassibility; but how? In her doubt and emotion she had recourse to the guide, the adviser of a Catholic wife—to her confessor.

When he was not wandering all over the country on his royalist propagandism, Father Alphée was

the queen's director. To see the man, was to recognize him at a glance for what he was. This Illyrian priest, with his pirate's countenance, had something of the blood, appearance, and features of one of those birds of prey and tempest who formerly swept the Latin seas. The son of a fisherman of Zara, brought up amongst sailors, in the midst of tar-brushes and fishing-nets, he had one day been picked out by the Franciscans for his pretty voice, and from cabin-boy had been raised to the rank of chorister. He grew up in the convent, and became one of the heads of the confraternity; but he had retained the impetuosity of the sailor and the complexion tanned by the sea-breeze, which the cloisters of the convent had not been able to bleach. Moreover, neither bigoted nor over-scrupulous, ready to draw his knife (*cotellata*) in the good cause; the monk, when political affairs pressed upon him, would despatch at early morning in a lump all the orisons of the day, and even of the morrow: "to get ahead," as he would gravely say. Ardent in his affection as well as in his hatred, he had vowed a boundless admiration to the tutor he had himself introduced into the royal establishment.

To the queen's first avowal of the agitation of her soul, of her scruples, the good priest turned a deaf ear; but when she insisted, he got angry, and rebuked her harshly, as if she were an ordinary penitent, some rich shopkeeper's wife of Ragusa.

Was she not ashamed to bring forward such childish nonsense in face of the great things at stake? What did she complain of? Had anyone been wanting in respect towards her? Fancy letting this man go—this man whom God had certainly sent to their aid for the triumph of royalty—on account of some foolish scruples, or the sentimentality of a woman who thinks herself irresistible! And in his sailor-like language, and his Italian emphasis toned down by a priestly smile, he added: "Pray do not let us cavil at the fair wind that is blown to us from heaven. We must set our sail and go ahead." The most upright of women will always give in to such plausible arguments. Conquered by the casuistry of the monk, Frédérique persuaded herself that she had no right to deprive her son of such a powerful auxiliary. It now depended upon herself alone to be strong and wary. What did she risk after all? Soon she became thoroughly convinced that she was mistaken about Elysée's devotion, about his enthusiastic friendship. The truth was that he loved her passionately. A strange deep love, which he had often thrust aside, but which each time had returned more ardent than ever, and which now asserted itself with all the despotism of a conqueror.

Hitherto Elysée Méraut had thought himself incapable of love. There had been moments when, stirred by the fire of his royalist speeches, some girl of the Quartier Latin, without understanding a

word of his harangue, would fall desperately in love with him, attracted by the music of his voice, the flash of his fiery glance, the passion of the ideal that emanated from him—the magnetic fascination of a Magdalen for an apostle. He would smilingly and condescendingly bend down to her, pluck the proffered flower, veiling with kindness and gentle affability the incorrigible contempt for women that lies at the bottom of every southerner's heart. For love to penetrate into his heart, it had first to take possession of his powerful mind ; and it was thus that his admiration for the haughty beauty of Frédérique, for that royal adversity so nobly borne, had slowly but surely become a real passion, heightened by the narrow existence and familiarity enforced by exile, by the daily, hourly intercourse, and the anxieties they had shared,—a humble, discreet, hopeless passion, which was content to burn at a distance, like the poor man's taper lighted on the lowest step of the altar.

Life went on, however, in appearance much as usual, heedless of this mute drama, and the first days of September arrived. Bathed in the rays of a warm sun that seemed to harmonize with the happy disposition of her mind, the queen was taking her daily stroll after breakfast, followed by the duke, Elysée and Madame de Silvis, who replaced the little princess as lady-in-waiting during her enforced absence. They all followed in the shady ivy-bordered paths in the little park, and every now



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and then the queen would turn round to throw them a word or phrase, with the graceful decided air which, however, took away nothing of her feminine charm. On that day she was particularly bright and lively. Good news from Illyria had been received that morning, telling of the excellent effect which had been produced by Christian's abdication, and the popularity of Leopold V., already far spread among the country people. Elysée Méraut was triumphant.

"Did I not tell you, Monsieur le Duc, that they would soon adore their little king? Childhood, you see, has the power of re-awakening love. We have infused into their hearts a new religion, with all its simplicity and fervour."

And, pushing back his hair with his two hands, by a violent gesture familiar to him, he dashed into one of the eloquent improvisations that always transfigured him; just as the dejected Arab, cowering in his rags on the ground, becomes transformed into a spirited cavalier when on horse-back.

"We are in for it," whispered the marquise, with a bored look, while the queen seated herself on the edge of the path under a weeping ash, in order to hear him better. The others stood respectfully around her, but by degrees the audience diminished. Madame de Silvis was the first to go, ostensibly to protest, as she never failed to do; presently the duke was called away for some detail of his service.

They remained alone. Elysée was not at first aware of this, and continued his discourse, standing in the sunlight, which brought out the irregularities of his noble features like the angular surfaces of a hard stone. He was handsome thus, with an intelligent, taking, irresistible beauty, which struck Frédérique so forcibly that she had not time to conceal her admiration. Did he read her thoughts in those sea-green eyes? Did he receive in return the electric shock communicated by this sentiment so vivid and so near? He stammered at first, then stopped short, his whole being trembling with emotion, and threw upon the queen's head, upon her golden hair spangled with a shimmer of light, a long look, burning with love—almost an avowal. Frédérique felt the warmth of this flame run through her, like a more blinding, more dazzling sun than the one in the heavens, but she had not the strength to turn away. And when, terrified at the thoughts that were rising to his lips, Elysée tore himself away from her, she remained penetrated to the very core by the magnetic power of this man and felt as if life were leaving her; her soul fainted within her, and she sat there, on that bench, helpless and crushed. Pale shadows floated over the gravel of the winding paths. The water trickled over the edges of the fountain, refreshing the lovely summer's day. Nothing could be heard in the flower-garden but a far-spread murmur of wings and the buzz of insects over the fragrant flower-

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beds, and the sharp crack of the little prince's rifle at the further end of the park, near the wood.

In the midst of this silence the queen recovered herself, first in a movement of anger and revolt. She felt the offence, the outrage of that look. Was it possible? Had she not been dreaming? She, the proud *Frédérique* who, in the dazzling brilliancy of courts, had disdained the homage of the most noble, the most illustrious hearts; she, who had so jealously guarded her own, throw it thus to a man of nought, to this son of the people! Tears of wounded pride blinded her eyes. And in the whirl of her thoughts, the prophetic words of old *Rosen* rang in her ears: "The Bohemia of Exile." Yes, exile alone, with its dishonouring promiscuities, could have emboldened this underling. But as she overwhelmed him with her contempt, the recollection of the services he had rendered rose before her. What would they have done without him? She remembered her emotion on their first meeting, how her hopes had revived as she listened to him. Since then, while the king took his pleasure, who had taken the direction of their destiny, repaired the blunders and the crimes? And the indefatigable devotion of each day, all the talent, the ardour, the genius that he had applied to the self-sacrificing task he had undertaken, devoid of all profit and glory for himself! Was not the result her little king, so truly king, of whom she was so proud, the future master of

Illyria! An invincible gush of tenderness and gratitude filled her heart, recalling that moment of the past when at the Vincennes fair, she had leaned upon the strong arm of Elysée; she closed her eyes now, as she had done then, and abandoned herself to delicious thoughts of him, of the great, devoted heart which she almost fancied she could feel beating against her own.

Suddenly, after a shot which had sent the birds flying through the branches, a terrible cry, one of those cries that mothers hear in their dreams when harassed with anxiety; a fearful cry of distress darkened the heavens, expanded the garden to the measure of an immense grief. Hurried steps were heard in the alleys; the hoarse, altered voice of the tutor was heard calling near the shooting-range. In one bound Frédérique was there.

It was at the end of the park, against a wall of verdure made up of hops, vines, wistaria and the tall vegetation of rank soil, in the green shade of an arbour. The targets hung against the trellis-work, pierced with little round regular holes. She saw her child stretched on his back motionless on the ground, his white face stained with red near the right eye, which let fall from under its closed lids drops of blood like tears. Elysée on his knees beside him, was wringing his hands and crying: "It is I! It is I!" He was passing. Monseigneur had begged him to try his rifle, and by a horrible fatality the ball had rebounded from some

bit of iron in the trellis. But the queen did not hear him. Without a cry, without a word, wholly given up to her maternal instinct, to the one thought of saving her child, she snatched him up in her arms, carried him wrapped in her dress to the fountain, then waving away the people of the house who hurried to help her, she placed her knee on which the little king lay inert, against the stone ledge, and held under the overflowing basin the beloved little pale face with the fair hair clinging to it in long damp locks, and allowed the water to stream down on to the discoloured eyelid, on the sinister red stain that the water washed away, but which continued to ooze out, brighter and brighter, from between the lashes. She did not speak, she did not even think. In her rumped, dripping cambric dress, that clung to her beautiful form, she looked like a marble naiad as she bent over her child and watched.

What a moment of anguish ! Little by little, revived by the immersion, the wounded child moved, stretched his limbs as if awaking, and began to moan.

“ He lives ! ” she cried in a delirium of joy.

Then as she raised her head, she perceived Méraut standing opposite to her, who by his pallor and dejection seemed to crave for pardon. The recollection of all she had felt on the bench in the garden mixed with the terrible shock of the catastrophe, the thought of her weakness so quickly

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followed by chastisement on her child, roused in her a fearful rage against this man and against herself.

“Go! go! Let me never see your face again!” she cried with a terrible glance. It was her love that she confessed before all, to punish and cure herself at the same time; the love which she threw as an affront in his face in the insulting tyranny of her command.





## XVI.

### THE DARK ROOM.

“ONCE upon a time, there lived in the Duchy of Oldenburg, a Countess Ponikau, who on her wedding-day had received three little golden loaves from the elves——”

It is Madame de Silvis who is thus relating a fairy tale, in a dark room, with windows and shutters hermetically closed, and heavy curtains let down to the floor. The little king is stretched on his small bed, while the queen, seated near him pale as a ghost, applies to his bandaged brow, pieces of ice which she has renewed every two minutes, day and night, for the last week. How has she managed to live without sleep, almost without food, seated by that narrow bedstead, holding her son's hands in her own whenever not busied in tending him, passing from the alternative of icy cold to the

fever heat, which she anxiously watches for and dreads to feel in that poor little weak pulse ?

The little king wants his mother near him, always by his side. The darkness of the great room is for him peopled with sinister shadows, terrifying apparitions. Then the impossibility in which he finds himself of reading or playing with his toys has thrown him into a torpor that alarms Frédérique.

“Are you in pain ?” she asks at every moment.

“No. But it is so dull,” replies the child in a spiritless voice ; and it is to drive away this dulness and fill the gloomy shades of the room with brighter visions that Madame de Silvis has reopened the fairy-tale book full of old German castles, of sprites dancing at the foot of the turreted keep where a princess spins with her glass distaff and awaits the arrival of the blue bird.

The queen is in despair as she listens to these interminable stories ; it seems to her that the work she has so laboriously accomplished is being slowly undone, and that she assists at the crumbling, stone by stone, of an upright triumphal column. It is this she sees before her in the darkened chamber during her long hours of seclusion, more troubled at the idea that her child has fallen back into women’s hands, has returned to his childish little Zara days, than anxious about the wound itself, the full gravity of which she is not yet aware of. When the doctor, lamp in hand, disperses for a moment the surrounding gloom,



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takes off the bandage, and tries by a drop of atropine to revive the sensibility of the injured eye, the mother is reassured at seeing that the little patient does not utter a cry, does not put his hand up to repel the doctor. Nobody dares to tell her that this insensibility, this quietude of the nerves, betokens the complete death of the organ. The bullet in its rebound, although it had spent a good deal of its strength, had struck and loosened the retina. The right eye is irretrievably gone. All the remedies now applied are directed solely to the preservation of the other eye, threatened on account of the organic co-relation which makes sight like a single instrument with double branches. Ah! if the queen knew the extent of her misfortune!—she who firmly believes that thanks to her care, her tender vigilance, the accident will leave no traces, and who already speaks to her child of their first drive.

“You will be pleased to take a nice long drive in the forest, will you not, Leopold?”

Yes, Leopold will be very pleased. He asks to be taken again to that fair where he went once with his mother and his tutor. Then suddenly interrupting himself, he inquires :

“Where is Monsieur Elysée? Why does he never come to see me?”

They tell him that his tutor is away, on a long journey. This explanation satisfies him. It tires him to think, even to speak; and he falls back into

a dull indifference ; returns to the vague misty country that envelopes the sick, mingling their dreams and surroundings with those actualities of life, the noise and movement of which are so dreaded for them by those who tend them. People come and go ; whispers and soft steps glide about. The queen hears nothing, heeds nothing but bathing the wound. At times Christian pushes open the door, ever ajar on account of the heat in the confined room, and in a voice that he strives to render joyous and careless, comes and tells his son some funny story, something to make him laugh or talk. But his voice rings false in this recent catastrophe, and the father intimidates the child. The young memory, smothered, filled with confusion by the gun-shot, has retained some strange recollections of past scenes, of the despairing expectations of the queen, of her revolt and indignation that evening when she had been so near throwing herself with him from the window. He answers the king in a low tone, through his clenched teeth. Then Christian turns to his wife : “ You should take a little rest, Frédérique ; you will kill yourself. In the interest of the child himself.” Imploringly the little prince presses his mother’s hand, who reassures him in the same mute and eloquent manner. “ No, no, do not fear. I shall not leave you.” She exchanges a few cold words with her husband and leaves him to his own gloomy thoughts.

The accident that has happened to his son is for Christian the final blow after a long series of misfortunes. He feels stunned and despairing, alone in the world. Ah! if his wife would only try him again! He has the craving the weak feel in misfortune to lean on someone, the longing for some friendly bosom on which to lay his head and pour out his tears, his remorse; only to return afterwards more light-hearted than before to new pleasures and new faithlessness. But Frédérique's heart is for ever lost to him, and now the child in his turn repulses his caresses. He says all this to himself as he stands at the foot of the bed in the gloom of the dark room, while the queen, counting the minutes, takes ice from a bowl, applies it to the wet bandage, raises and kisses the little sick brow in order to ascertain its temperature, and Madame de Silvis gravely goes on with the story of the three little golden loaves to amuse the legitimate sovereign of Illyria and Dalmatia.

Without his exit being more noticed than his entry, Christian leaves the room, wanders sadly about the silent, orderly house, kept up to its usual ceremonial by old Rosen, who is to be seen coming and going from the pavilion to the mansion, ever erect, notwithstanding the perpetual shake of his head. The hothouse, the garden, continue to bloom; the marmosets, revived by the warmer atmosphere, fill their cage with chatter and capers. The little prince's pony, led up and down by a

groom in the courtyard strewn with litter, stops at the steps, and sadly turns its hazel eyes in the direction from whence the little king formerly used to issue forth. The aspect of the mansion is still elegant and comfortable ; but an air of expectancy hangs over all, there is a suspense in its very life, a silence such as reigns after the blast of a great storm. The most striking spectacle are the three closed shutters up yonder, hermetically sealed, even when all else opens to fresh air and light, shutting in behind them the mystery of suffering and disease.

Mérait, who, dismissed from the royal household, has taken lodgings hard by, ceaselessly prowls round, and despairingly watches these closed windows. It is his torture and his condemnation. Hither he returns each day, dreading lest he may one morning find them wide open, with the last vapour of an extinguished wax-taper floating out upon the air. The inhabitants of that quarter of Saint-Mandé begin to know him. The woman who sells the cakes drops her rattle when the big unhappy-looking fellow passes by, the players on the bowling-green, the tramway clerk shut up in his small wooden hut, think he is slightly crazed ; and in truth there is madness in his despair. It is not the lover who suffers. The queen has done well to dismiss him, he deserved that, he thinks ; and his passion vanishes in the greatness of the disaster that has engulfed all his hopes. To have

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dreamed of making a king, to have devoted his life to such a magnificent task, and to have broken and destroyed everything with his own hands!



The father and the mother, more cruelly struck in their tenderness, were not more desperately afflicted than he. He had not even the consolation of tending and devoting himself at all hours to the sufferer ; hardly could he obtain news, the servants

bearing deep resentment since the accident. One of the forest-rangers, however, who had access to the house, repeated to him the gossip of the servants' hall, magnified by that love of the terrible that is innate in the people. At times, the little king was said to be blind, at others, he had brain-fever, and the queen, it was added, had resolved to let herself die of hunger ; and the unhappy Elysée would live a whole day musing over this dismal rumour, wandering through the wood as long as his legs would carry him, and then returning to his watch at the edge of the grounds, amid the tall flowery grass, so trampled on Sundays, but which, deserted on the weekdays, resumed its rural and picturesque aspect.

One evening, as the night was falling, he had stretched himself down in the fresh meadow, his eyes turned towards the house, on which the rays of the setting sun were dying away among the entwined branches. The bowlers were leaving the green, the keepers beginning their evening round, and the swallows flew in great circles above the tallest grasses, in pursuit of the gnats that had descended lower with the setting sun. It was a melancholy hour. Elysée seemed overwhelmed, weary both in mind and body ; and all the recollections, all the anxieties of his past life were awakened within him, as though, in the silence of nature, his inward struggle found vent more easily.

Suddenly, his vague glance was arrested by the sight of the awkward gait, the Quaker hat, the white waistcoat, and gaiters of Boscovich. The councillor walking rapidly, with little, hurried feminine steps, looked very agitated, and held an object carefully wrapped up in his pocket-handkerchief. He did not appear surprised at seeing Elysée, but went up to him as if nothing had happened, and said to him, in the most natural manner in the world :

“ My dear Méraut, you see a very happy man.”

“ Ah ! Good Heavens ! What ! Is Monseigneur’s state—— ? ”

The botanist’s face assumed a serious expression suitable to the occasion, and replied that Monseigneur was in just the same condition : kept in bed, in a dark room. Oh ! a very painful state of suspense, very painful indeed ! Then, abruptly changing his tone, he said :

“ Guess what I have got here. Take care, it is very delicate, you might loosen the earth. A clematis root ; not the common clematis of our gardens, but the *Clematis Dalmatica*, a particular dwarf kind only found in my country. When I first saw it, I had doubts. I have watched it grow ever since the early spring. But look at the stalk, the corolla ; smell the perfume of crushed almonds.”

He opened his handkerchief with infinite precautions, and produced a weak, crooked, milky-

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white flower, shaded green, the blossom hardly distinguishable from the pale leaves. Méraut strove to question him, to obtain other news; but the eccentric old fellow was completely absorbed by his discovery. It was, indeed, a strange thing that this little plant should—the only one of its kind—have grown six hundred miles from its native soil. Flowers have their history, and also their romance; and it was the probable romance that the old man repeated to himself, thinking the while that he was relating it to Méraut.

“By what peculiarity of the soil, what geological mystery, has this little wandering seed germinated at the foot of an oak at Saint-Mandé? Such cases are sometimes met with. A friend of mine, a botanist, found, I remember, a Lapland flower in the Pyrenees. It is no doubt due to atmospherical currents, to some stray vein of soil peculiar to the spot. But the wonderful thing in the present case is that the plant should have grown in the immediate neighbourhood of its compatriots, exiles also. And look how it has thriven! A little pale, no doubt, from its exile, but its tendrils are all ready to climb up.”

He stood there, in the twilight, his clematis in his hand, motionless and happy in his admiration. Suddenly he said:

“The deuce! It is getting late. I must go in. Good bye.”


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“I will come with you,” said Elysée.

Boscovich was thunderstruck. He had witnessed the scene, known how the tutor had been dismissed, although, however, he attributed his dismissal only to the accident. But what would be thought? What would the queen say?

“No one will see me, Monsieur the Councillor. You will let me in by the avenue, and I can creep up quietly as far as the room.”

“What! you want to——?”

“To be near Monseigneur, to hear his voice for one moment, without his even guessing that I am there.”

Boscovich remonstrated and weakly opposed him, but he still walked on, urged on by Elysée's desire, who eagerly followed, regardless of his protestations. Oh! what cruel emotion Méraut felt when the little door on the avenue opened amid the thick ivy, and he found himself once more on the spot where his whole life had foundered!

“Wait here for me,” said the councillor, trembling; “I will come and tell you when the servants are at table. In that way you will avoid meeting anyone on the stairs.”

No one had ventured back to the shooting-ground since the fatal day. The trampled borders and paths still bore the impress of the distracted footsteps. The same pierced targets hung to the

trellis, the water flowed from the basin like an inexhaustible spring of tears, grey in the sad hour of twilight, and it seemed to Elysée that he again heard the voice of the queen sobbing, and the "Go, go!" which ever re-echoed through his memory, bringing with it the sensation of a wound and a caress. When Boscovich returned, they glided along the shrubbery as far as the house. In the glass gallery opening on to the garden, which they used as a schoolroom, the books still lay upon the table, the two chairs for master and pupil stood ready, waiting for the next lesson with that cruel inertia of inanimate objects. It all wore a poignant aspect, the aspect of a place that a child brightens with his presence, dashing about in his narrow circle, filling it with laughter and songs, and which when the child is gone seems desolate and mournful.

Boscovich, followed by Elysée, went up the brilliantly-lighted stairs, and led him into the room which preceded the king's, and which, in order that not the slightest ray of light should penetrate his chamber, was also kept in obscurity. A night-light alone burned in a recess, and shone through the surrounding physic bottles and draughts.

"The queen and Madame de Silvis are with him. Mind you do not utter a word, and come back quickly."

Elysée no longer heard him, his foot was already on the threshold, and his heart beat with a feeling of awe. His eyes, unaccustomed to the darkness, could not pierce the gloom. He could distinguish nothing ; but from the further end of the room, a childish voice arose, repeating the evening prayers—a voice that he could hardly recognize as that of the little king, so weary, dismal, and tired did it sound. After one of the numerous “Amens,” the child paused, and said :

“Mamma, must I also say the king’s prayer ?”

“Yes, darling,” replied a noble, grave voice, the tone of which was very much changed too, wavering, like a metal that has had its edges worn by the constant dripping of a corrosive acid.

The prince hesitated, and said :

“I thought—it seemed to me that it was hardly worth while now.”

The queen asked sharply :

“Why not ?”

“Oh !” said the child-king thoughtfully, in the tone of an old man, “I think there are many other things I have to ask of God than what are in that prayer.”

But, his kindly little nature reasserting itself, he added :

“I will say it at once, mamma, at once, as you wish it.”

And slowly he began in a resigned and shaky voice.

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*“ O Lord, my God, Thou hast placed Thy servant on the throne, but I am only a child, knowing not how to guide myself, and charged with the guidance of the people Thou hast given unto me.”*

A stifled sob was heard at the end of the room. The queen started :

“ Who is there ? Is it you, Christian ? ” she added, as she heard the door shut.

At the end of the week, the doctor announced that the little patient was no longer to be condemned to a dark room, and that the time had come to admit a little light.

“ Already ? ” said Frédérique. “ You had said that this darkness must last for a month.”

The doctor dared not tell her that the eye being dead, irretrievably lost, without the slightest chance of recovery, the confinement became useless. The queen did not understand, and no one had the courage to tell her the truth. They awaited Father Alphée’s return, religion being the solace of all wounds, even of those that it cannot cure. In his rough, gruff manner, the monk, who was in the habit of using God’s word like a cudgel, dealt her the terrible blow which was to crush and annihilate all Frédérique’s pride. The mother had suffered on the day of the accident, all her maternal fibres wrung by the cries, the fainting, the blood that ran

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from the poor little fellow. This second grief fell more directly on the queen. Her son disfigured, mutilated ! She who had longed for him to be handsome for the day of triumph, was she to present this cripple to the Illyrians ? She could not forgive the doctor for having so deceived her. Thus, even in exile, kings are always the victims of their own grandeur and of human cowardice !

In order to avoid too abrupt a transition from darkness to light, the windows had been covered with green baize blinds ; later on full daylight was admitted, and when the actors of the melancholy drama could once more see each other in the full light of day, they perceived the terrible changes wrought by this sad seclusion. Frédérique had grown old, and was obliged to change the style of doing her hair, to smooth it down on her brow to hide the grey locks. The little prince, very pallid, wore a bandage over his right eye, and his whole face, marked with premature wrinkles, seemed to bear the weight of this bandage. How strange too, was this new existence of an invalid ! At table he had once more to learn how to eat ; his spoon or his fork, awkwardly handled, touched his forehead or his ear, the deficiency of one sense affecting all the others.

He would laugh a sick, weakly laugh, and the queen at each moment turned away her head to hide her tears.

As soon as he could go into the gardens, fresh anxieties assailed her. He would hesitate, stumble at every step, walk askew instead of in a straight line, fall even ; or else draw back timidly at the least obstacle, clinging to his mother's hands or



skirts ; turning round the familiar angles of the park as though they were so many ambushes laid for him. The queen strove to rouse his mind, but no doubt the shock had been too great ; and with the sight of one eye, a ray of intelligence seemed also lost. He understood, poor little fellow, how painful his state was for his mother ; and in speak-

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ing to her, he raised his head with an effort, casting a timid and awkward glance at her, as though to implore pity for his weak state. He could not, however, overcome certain instinctive terrors. Thus, the sound of a shot fired on the edge of the wood, the first he had heard since his accident, nearly brought on an attack of epilepsy. The first time they spoke to him about riding his pony, he trembled from head to foot.

“No, no, I entreat you,” he said, pressing close to Frédéric’s side. “Take me with you in the carriage. I am too afraid.”

“Afraid of what?”

“I’m afraid—dreadfully afraid.”

Neither reasoning nor entreaties could prevail.

“Well then,” said the queen, with subdued anger, “get the carriage ready.”

It was a beautiful autumnal Sunday, very like that Sunday in May when they had gone to Vincennes. In contradistinction, however, to that day, Frédéric felt harassed by the plebeian crowd spread over all the avenues and grass plots. This open-air rejoicing, the smell of the victuals nauseated her. Now she saw but the poverty and distress that lay beneath the laughter and holiday clothes. In vain did the child strive to bring a smile on the beautiful face, which he thought he had saddened, and to propitiate his mother with passionate, yet timid coaxings.

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“ You are angry with me, mamma, because I would not ride the pony ? ”

No, she was not angry with him. But how would he manage on the day of his coronation, when his subjects should have recalled him ? A king ought to know how to ride.

The little wrinkled face turned round to look inquiringly at the queen, with his only eye.

“ Do you really think they will care to have me as I am now ? ”

He looks very puny, very wizen. Frédérique, however, was indignant at the doubt, and mentioned the King of Westphalia, who was quite blind.

“ Oh ! He is not a real king. They sent him away.”

Then she related to him the story of John of Bohemia, at the battle of Crecy, how he charged his knights to lead him far enough into the battle to strike with his sword ; and so far had they led him, that the following day they were all found dead side by side, their bodies stretched out, and their horses fastened together.

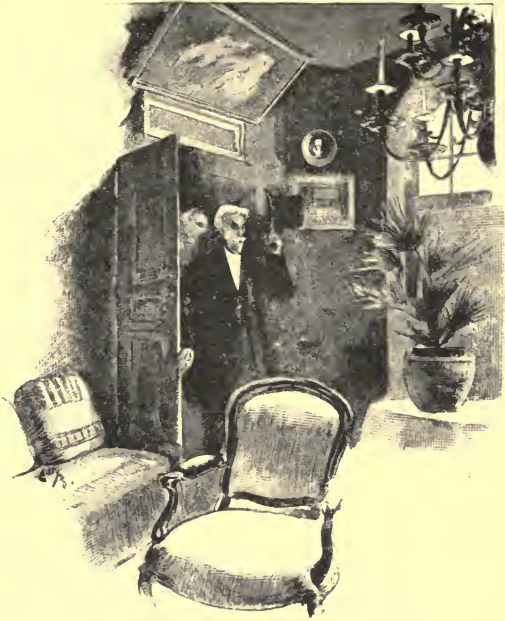
“ Oh ! that was terrible—terrible ! ” said Léopold.

And he shuddered, pondering over the heroic deed, as though it were one of Madame de Silvis's fairy-tales ; a poor, weak child, with little of a king about him ! At that moment the carriage



left the shores of the lake, and turned down a narrow road, where there was barely room for it to pass. Someone quickly drew back—a man, whom the child, hindered by his bandage, did not notice, but whom the queen recognized at once. Grave, with a hard look, with a motion of her head, she showed him the poor cripple, nestling in her skirts, their master-piece shattered; this fragment and wreck of a great race. It was their last meeting; after this, Méraut definitively left Saint-Mandé.





## XVII.

FIDES, SPES.

THE Duke of Rosen was the first to enter.

“It is a little damp,” he said gravely. “It has not been opened since my son’s death.”

And indeed a great chilliness filled the air ; the cold damp of a tomb struck upon the senses in this magnificent suite of rooms, where the guzlas had

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sounded so proudly, and where nothing had changed place since the night of the ball. The two carved chairs of the king and queen still presided over the scene from their place by the musician's gallery, magnificent desks in wrought iron standing beyond them. Armchairs set together in circles formed aristocratic nooks. Ribbons, scraps of flowers, crumpled gauze, the dust of the dance, lay scattered on the floors. It was evident that the decorators had hurriedly taken down the hangings and the garlands of flowers, and had hastened to shut both doors and windows upon these saloons which recalled scenes of festivity only in this house of mourning. The same neglect was visible in the garden littered with dead leaves, over which had passed first the winter, and then an uncared-for and uncontrolled springtime with its invasion of weeds. In his grief, which insisted that all around him should be as mournful and barren as his own life, the duke had allowed nothing to be touched, any more than he would himself consent to occupy his magnificent home.

Since the affair of Gravosa, and since Colette, in very delicate health after the birth of her little W., had gone off to Nice with the child for change of air, he had given up his solitary home-life at the Quay d'Anjou, and had caused a bed to be put up for him at the office. It was evident he would one day or other sell the family mansion, and even now was preparing the way by getting rid of the

sumptuous relics of antiquity with which it was crowded. The Venetian mirrors, which had reflected the images of loving couples whirling in Hungarian mazourkas, the flashes darted by bright eyes and sparkling chandeliers, had nothing else to reflect to-day in the grey chill light of a Parisian sky but the queer profiles, the lucre-loving eyes and greedy lips of old Leemans and of Pichery his acolyte, with side curls and moustaches stiff with cosmetics on the dirty pallor of his face.

Truly it needed all the long force of habit on the dealer's part, his constant experience of trade and of those comedies which bring into play every expression of the human countenance, to keep back the cry of joy and admiration that almost escaped him when the general's servant, as old and stiffly upright as his master, had opened the tall shutters, throwing them back against the northern wall with a noisy clatter, letting in the light upon the precious treasures of a collection gleaming with all the subdued hues of wood, ivory, and bronze, not labelled or cared-for like that of Madame de Spalato, but in far more luxurious abundance, of a more barbaric kind, though of more recent date. Not a flaw anywhere! Old Rosen had not looted at random, after the fashion of those generals who pass through a summer palace like a hurricane, carrying off with the same violence bell-turreted roofs and bits of straw. Here were none but marvels of taste. And it was curious to note the dealer's

decisions, as he fixed his glass on first one object then another, tenderly scratching the enamels, ringing the bronzes, with an air of indifference, even of contempt, while all the time, from head to foot, from the tips of his fingers to the point of his flat beard, every nerve within him vibrated and quivered as if put in communication with an electric battery. Pichery was no less amusing to watch. Having no notion of art himself, he modelled his impressions upon those of his comrade, paraded the same scornful airs, quickly turned to stupefaction when Leemans whispered low in his ear, as he bent over the pocket-book in which he unceasingly made notes: "Worth four thousand pounds, if it's worth a farthing." Here was an unique opportunity for both to recoup themselves from the effects of that "grand stroke" in which they had been so ignominiously done. But it was necessary to be well on guard, for the old general of Pandours, just as suspicious and as impenetrable as the whole bric-à-brac-dealing community put together, followed them step by step, and planted himself behind them, not for a moment duped by their antics and gestures.

Thus they reached at last the end of the reception-rooms, and stopped before a little room raised two steps, and charmingly decorated in the Moorish style, with very low divans, and carpets and cabinets of the most genuine antiquity.

"Is this included?" asked Leemans.

The general hesitated imperceptibly before replying. It was Colette's favourite boudoir, the refuge to which she resorted in her rare moments of leisure to write her letters. For a moment the thought occurred to him to save these Eastern decorations she had liked ; but he did not linger over the idea ; all must be sold.

"Yes, included," he said coldly.

Leemans, attracted at once by the rarity of a piece of Moorish furniture, carved, gilt, with miniature arcades and galleries, began to examine its endless drawers and secret-hiding places, opening one out of another by means of concealed springs, narrow little drawers smelling freshly of orange flowers and sandal wood as their polished surfaces met the air. Plunging his hand into one of them, something crackled beneath his touch.

"There are some papers here," he said.

The inventory finished, the two dealers shown to the door, the duke bethought him of these papers forgotten in the dainty piece of furniture. There was a whole packet of letters, tied round with a well-worn ribbon and impregnated with the delicate perfume of the drawer. Mechanically he glanced at them and recognised the writing, the large, fantastic, irregular writing of Christian, which for many months he had had ample opportunities of studying on bills and drafts. No doubt they were letters from the king to Herbert. Alas, no ! "*Colette, my darling.*" With an abrupt gesture he

tore off the band and scattered the bundle on a divan ; some thirty notes, appointments of rendezvous, thanks, delays, all the correspondence of an intrigue in its sad sameness, terminating finally in excuses for appointments not kept, in missives growing cooler and scarcer like the last fluttering papers on the tail of a kite. In all and every one of these letters were numerous allusions to a tiresome and persecuting bore, whom Christian jestingly called "Courtier of misfortune," or merely "C. of misfortune," and on whom the duke was unable to put a name until, on the turn of one of these mocking pages, invariably more libertine than sentimental, he beheld a caricature of himself, his tiny pointed head perched above long stilt-like legs and claws. It was himself, his wrinkles, his eagle nose, his blinking eyes ; and beneath, in order to leave no room for doubt : *Courtier of misfortune keeping guard on the Quai d'Orsay.*

The first surprise over, the outrage comprehended in all its baseness, the old man ejaculated "Oh!" and remained motionless and stunned.

That his son had been betrayed was not what astonished him. But that this Christian, for whom they had sacrificed everything, for whom Herbert had given his life when only twenty-eight years of age, for whom he was in a fair way of ruining himself, on the point of selling even his trophies of victory that the royal signature should not be dishonoured——. Ah ! if he could only avenge him

self, if he could only take down from those panoplies of arms two weapons, no matter which. But he was the king ! And suddenly the magic of the sacred word cooled his anger, and he reflected that, after all, his Majesty, in trifling with one of his fair subjects, was not so culpable as he, the Duc de Rosen, who had married his son to a Sauvadon. He must now pay the penalty of his cupidity. All those reflections lasted but a minute. Putting the letters under lock and key he went out, and returned to his post at Saint-Mandé in the pavilion, where notes and papers of all sorts were awaiting him, among which he recognised more than once the large, irregular hand-writing of the love-letters ; and Christian could not have guessed that the old man was aware of all that had taken place, when, passing through the yard on the following days, he perceived behind the window panes the tall, gaunt profile, ever upright, devoted and watchful, of the " Courtier of misfortune."

It is the privilege of kings, with the halo of national traditions and superstitions which surrounds them, to inspire devotion such as this, even when totally unworthy of it. Now that his child was out of danger, Christian II. plunged afresh into dissipation more madly than ever. He had at first tried to regain Séphora. Yes, even after having been brutally and cynically turned away, after having had every proof of her treachery, he still loved her enough to fly to her feet at the least

sign. The fair lady was at this moment wholly given up to the joys and delights of a renewed honeymoon. Cured of her ambitions, fallen back into the wonted tranquillity of her nature from which the alluring bait of millions had drawn her, she would fain have sold her mansion, have realised everything, and have gone to live at Courbevoie with J. Tom as wealthy retired tradespeople, and have satisfied her vanity by crushing the Sprichts with her superior luxury. J. Tom Levis on the contrary dreamed of new speculations ; the pompous grandeur of his wife's surroundings gave him little by little the idea of another agency, under a more luxurious and worldly form, business in white kid gloves, amid the flowers and music of balls and parties, around the lake, on the race-course ; the cab, now out of date and relegated to the ranks of hired vehicles, should be replaced by a handsome carriage with servants in livery, and bearing the motto and monogram of the countess. He had not much difficulty in persuading Séphora, in whose house he had now definitively taken up his abode. The reception rooms of the Avenue de Messine were in consequence opened for a series of balls and dinners, the invitations for which were sent out in the names of the Comte and Comtesse de Spalato. At first the guests were few and far between. Then, after a while, the female element, rebellious in the beginning, ended by treating J. Tom Levis and his wife as one of those wealthy foreign couples come

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from far lands, whose luxury and splendour cause their exotic origin to be forgiven. All the gilded youth pressed round Séphora, whom her adventures had made the fashion of the day, and Monsieur le Comte from the very first winter was able to put some excellent affairs in hand.

It was impossible to refuse Christian admission to the salons that had cost him so dear. At first, this title of king lent éclat to the house and gave it a certain standing. He came there like a coward, with the vague hope of once more reaching the Comtesse's heart, not by the grand staircase but by the back stairs. After having for awhile displayed himself in this rôle of dupe or victim, having shown his pale face, white as his shirt-front, once a week in the gilded recess of a window where the whirling eyes of Tom Levis riveted him to the spot with their ceaseless watch, he became discouraged, came no longer, and to divert his thoughts, took to bad company and low women. Like all men in search of a type once lost, he wandered everywhere, lost himself often, descended lower and lower, guided by Lebeau, a fellow well inured to Parisian vice, who thought nothing of taking his master's portmanteau in the morning to very strange haunts indeed. It was a real descent of Avernus, easier day by day to this weak soul, made weaker still by the voluptuary's life he had led ; and the melancholy calm of his home was not calculated to turn him from it. There was very little gaiety in the

Rue Herbillon now that neither Méraut nor the princess were there. Léopold V. was recovering gradually, confided during his convalescence to the care of Madame de Silvis, who was thus at last able to apply the precepts of the Abbé Diguët on the six methods of knowing men, and the seven methods of turning aside flatterers. Sad lessons they were, the child's attention distracted by the bandage which covered one side of his head, and the queen presiding as she had been used to do, but with a heart-broken glance directed towards the *Clematis Dalmatica*, the little flower of exile, pining away its life against the glass of the conservatory. For some time past the Franciscans had been in search of another tutor ; but it was not easy to find two Elysée Mérauts among the youth of the day. Father Alphée for his part had a definite idea, which he took care to keep to himself for the present, for the queen would not permit the former tutor's name to be mentioned in her presence. Once, however, under circumstances of great gravity, the monk ventured to speak of his friend.

“Madame, Elysée Méraut is dying,” he said as they left the table, after grace had been said.

During the whole time he was at Saint-Mandé, Méraut had kept on his room in the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince, being moved thereto by a sort of superstition, just as a man sometimes keeps on the top shelf of a wardrobe some old-fashioned garment of

his youth that he will never wear again. He never came there, allowing forgetfulness to fold over the books and papers, and the mystery of this retreat ever silent and closed in the midst of the noisy furnished lodgings which surrounded it. One day at last he returned to it, aged, weary, his locks almost white. The fat landlady, roused from her torpor by hearing a searching among the keys hung on their hooks, scarcely recognised her former lodger.

“What *have* you done to yourself, my poor Monsieur M é r a u t ? What a shame to ruin your health in this way ? It should not be allowed.”

“It is true, I am rather used up ;” answered Elysée smiling, and up he mounted to his fifth story with rounded stooping back, utterly crushed.

The room was unaltered ; the same melancholy horizon appeared through its dull windows—the roofs of the square courtyards of the monastery, of the *École de Médecine*, the amphitheatre, chilly monuments, communicating to the gazer something of the melancholy of their destined uses ; and on the right, towards the Rue Racine, the two great water reservoirs of the city, gleaming in their vast stone basins and reflecting the wan sky and smoky chimneys. Nothing was changed, but for him was lost for ever the noble ardour and vivacity of youth that gives colour and warmth to all things and only increases in face of difficulties and distress. He tried to set himself steadily to work, to read, he shook the dust from the unfinished work. But

between his thoughts and the page before him, glided the queen's look of reproach, and it seemed to him as if his little pupil was seated at the other end of the table waiting for his lesson and listening to him. He felt too lonely, too heart-broken, and hurriedly went down stairs again and hung his key on its nail. From that time he was to be seen, as in bygone days, with his great ungainly figure, his hat well at the back of his head, a bundle of books and reviews under his arm, wandering about the Quartier Latin, beneath the arcades of the Odéon, on the Quai Voltaire, bent over the odour of fresh print and the great clumsy cases of second-hand literature, reading as he passed along the streets, or the alleys of the Luxembourg, or gesticulating as he leant against some statue in the garden in the keenest weather, in front of the fountain's frozen basin. In this centre of study and of intelligence, which the hand of the demolishers of old Paris has not yet reached nor driven away, he regained his ardour and spirit. Only his audience was no longer the same, for the stream of students changes and is often renewed in this home of birds of passage. The meetings, too, had changed their head-quarters ; the political cafés were now deserted for the taverns where the attendants are girls dressed in fancy costumes : Swiss, Italian, Swede, in spruce tinselled garb designed by some fashionable artist. Of Elysée's old rivals, of the fine orators of his time, Pesquidoux of the *Voltaire*, Larminat

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of the *Procope*, there remained nothing but a vague souvenir in the minds of the waiters, as of actors long since withdrawn from the footlights. Some few had mounted high and were now in power, well to the front in public life ; and sometimes as Elysée strolled along among the shops, his hair streaming in the wind, from a passing carriage some illustrious member of the Senate or the Chamber of Deputies would call to him : “ Méraut, Méraut.” Then they would talk together : “ What are you doing ? are you working ? ” Méraut, with knitted brow, talked vaguely of some great undertaking that “ had not succeeded.” Not a word more. They would gladly have drawn him out, utilised this lost power thrown away. But he remained faithful to his monarchical ideas and his hatred of the Revolution. He asked for nothing, had need of no one ; nearly all the money he had gained in his tutorship was still untouched, he did not even seek to give lessons, and wrapped himself up in a disdainful sorrow, too great, too profound to be comprehensible, without any other distractions than a few visits to the convent of the Franciscans ; there he had news of Saint-Mandé, and he loved the quaint chapel with its Jerusalem cavern and bleeding and highly coloured Christ. This naïve mythology, these almost pagan representations delighted him—a christian of the first centuries of faith. “ Philosophers place God too high,” he would say sometimes, “ they have made him invisible.” He,

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for his part, could see Him well in the dark gloom of the crypt, and among all the images undergoing barbaric penance, beside the Margaret d'Ossuna scourging the marble of her shoulders, he recalled the vision of that Christmas Eve—the Queen of Illyria, before the manger with clasped hands and outstretched arms that held her son, with a gesture that was imploring and protecting at the same time.

One night Elysée was awakened with a start by a singular sensation of heat mounting upwards from his chest slowly like a rising tide, without shock or pain, but with a sensation of approaching death, and in his mouth an insipid taste of blood. It was a mysterious and sinister approach of disease after the fashion of an assassin who steals in noiselessly in the dark. He was not alarmed, but consulted the young medical students of his table d'hôte. They told him he must be very ill. "What is the matter with me?" "Everything." He had reached forty years, that climacteric of Bohemia, when infirmities lie in wait, and watch their man, making him pay dear for the excesses or privations of his youth; a terrible age, above all when the moral spring is broken, when the wish to live no longer exists. Elysée led the same existence, always out in rain and wind; passing from the overheated rooms, the vitiated atmosphere of gas-lit rooms, to the cold of the street in mid-winter, continuing—long after all lights were out—to

discuss on the edge of the pavement, and walking half through the night. The hæmorrhages became more frequent ; fearful languor followed them. In order not to take to his bed, for the melancholy solitude of his room weighed upon him, he settled himself at the *Rialto*, a tavern next door to the hotel, and there read his papers and dreamed his



dreams in a corner. The spot was quiet enough till the evening, and bright with its furniture in polished oak, its walls covered with frescoes representing Venice, with

bridges and cupolas in perspective over a liquid rainbow. The Venetian attendants themselves, who in the evening were so alert, swinging their leather money bags between the benches, while their coral necklaces were reflected in the glasses, were at this hour asleep with their heads on the table, crumpling their high lace caps and their puffed cambric sleeves, or else were seated around the stove at work upon their sewing, which they left every now and then to drink with

some student. One of them, a tall powerful girl, had thick auburn hair twisted on the top of her head, and her hands moved with grave, slow gestures over her embroidery while she paused at times in the act of listening. Méraut watched her for hours till she spoke, when a hoarse and vulgar voice broke the spell. But soon strength failed him even for these hours spent behind the tavern curtain. He could no longer come downstairs, but was obliged to remain in bed surrounded by books and papers, leaving his door wide open, so that some echo of life, some of the swarming busy movement of the hotel might reach him.

Above all he was forbidden to speak. Then the Southerner resigned himself to writing, and with fevered and trembling hand took up his book again, the famous book upon monarchy, and worked at it while shaken by a cough that scattered the pages wide over the bed. Now he only dreaded one thing—that he should die before he had finished, and steal away from life as he had lived, hidden, unknown and unexpressed.

Sauvadon, the old uncle at Bercy, whose coarse vanity suffered a shock in seeing his old master in such a garret, visited him often. Directly after the catastrophe he had hastened to Elysée's side, with open purse, in search as before, of "ideas upon things." "Uncle, I have no longer any," Elysée had answered wearily. To draw him from his apathy, the worthy man talked of sending him to

the South, to Nice, to share the sumptuous quarters of Colette and her little W.

“It will cost me no more,” he said naïvely, “and it may cure you.”

But Elysée was not anxious to be cured, wishing only to finish his book in the same spot where

the idea of it had germinated, amid those profound murmurs of Paris in which each hears the dominant note that

he seeks. While

he wrote, Sauvadon, seated at

the foot of the

bed, maun-

dered on about

his pretty niece,

and worked himself into further irritation against that old

lunatic the General who was about to sell his house of the Ile Saint-Louis.

“What in the world can he do with all that money? He must hide it away in holes, in little heaps. After all, it is his own look out. Colette is rich enough to do without him.”

And the wine-merchant slapped a side pocket on the tight and drum-like rotundity of his stomach.

Another time, throwing on the bed the bundle



of daily papers he brought to Elysée, he said : “It seems they are making a stir in Illyria again. They have just returned a royalist majority to the Diet of Leybach. Ah ! if they only had a man there ! But that poor little Léopold is very young yet, and Christian sinks lower and lower every day. Now he frequents the lowest dancing saloons and houses with his valet.” Elysée heard, and shivered all over. Poor queen ! The other went on, without noticing the pain he caused :

“They go a rare pace, our noble exiles. There is the Prince d’Axel horribly compromised in that disgraceful affair of the Avenue d’Antin. You know, that ‘family hotel’ which, with its patriarchal name, serves as a shelter for debauched young girls. What a scandal ! An heir presumptive. One thing however about it puzzles me. At the very moment of the ‘family’ scandal, Colette wrote me word that Monseigneur was at Nice, and that she had been at the regatta in a yacht hired for her by his Highness. There must be a mistake somewhere. I should be very glad of it, for between ourselves, my dear Mèrault——”

Here the good soul with great mystery confided to his friend that the prince royal “had been paying great attention to Colette, and as she was not a woman to ——, as you can suppose, it might be, that before long——”

The wide peasant face of the parvenu lighted up with a smile :

“Just think of that: Colette, Queen of Finland! and Sauvadon of Bercy, her old uncle, becoming uncle to a king. But I am tiring you.”

“Yes, I should like to sleep,” said Elysée, who had for some moments lain with closed eyes, a polite way of getting rid of this worthy, but vain chatterbox.

The uncle once gone, he gathered his papers together, and settled himself to write, but without being able to trace a single line, so overcome was he by extreme weariness and disgust of life. All these hideous stories made his heart sink. In face of the pages lying scattered over his bed, this pleading for royalty, in which he was using up the little life-blood that remained to him, looking upon himself in that sordid room with the whitened hair of an aged scholar, reviewing the lost ardour, the spent forces, he for the first time doubted, and asked himself if he had not been all his life a dupe. A defender, an apostle! Of what? Of these kings who were wallowing in degraded pleasures, and deserted their own cause. And while his eyes wandered sadly over the bare walls, within which the setting sun reached him only by reflections from the windows opposite, he beheld in its dusty old frame the red seal “*Fides, Spes,*” that he had taken from his father’s bedside. Suddenly the fine old Bourbon head of father Méraut appeared to him as he had last seen it, rigid and calm in the slumber of death, fallen asleep in the midst of his sublime

confidence and fidelity ; and then rose before him too, the narrow and steep lanes, the horizon of crumbling windmills standing high between the dry sunburnt rock of the hill side, and the implacable deep blue of the southern sky. It was a moment of hallucinations ; the *enclos de Rey*, all his youth floated through a memory over which the mists were already stealing.

All at once the door opened with a murmuring of voices and rustling of skirts. He thought it was some neighbour, some kindly attendant of the *Rialto*, bringing a refreshing drink for his parched mouth. Quickly he shut his eyes, that readily feigned sleep that dismissed unwelcome visitors. But little hesitating footsteps drew near over the cold, polished floor of the narrow room. A soft voice murmured : “ Good morning, Monsieur Méraut.” Before him stood his pupil, a little grown, gazing with his sickly and constitutional timidity at the poor pale tutor, so sadly changed, stretched on his wretched bed. In the background, by the door, a woman, proud, erect, and deeply veiled, stood awaiting. She had come ; she had mounted the five stories, passed up the staircase alive with sounds of debauchery, brushed with her immaculate skirts by the doors labelled : “ Alice—Clémence.” She could not let him die without seeing his little Zara again ; and, without entering the room herself, sent him her forgiveness by the little hand of her child. That hand Elysée Méraut

took and pressed against his lips ; then, turning towards the august apparition whose presence he guessed upon his threshold, he summoned his remaining strength, and, with his last breath, his last effort of life, he said, in a low voice and for the last time : “ Long live the King ! ”





XVIII.

THE LAST OF A RACE.

THERE was a well-contested match going on that morning at the tennis-court. Around the immense court, the well-beaten and trodden arena was enclosed by a great net which with its narrow meshes protected the evolutions of six players in white jackets and tennis shoes, bounding, shouting, and striking at the balls with their heavy rackets. The light falling from the ceiling, the stretched net, the hoarse cries, the jumps and erratic springs of the white jackets, the cool, impassive manner of the attendants—every one of them English—slowly pacing the surrounding gallery, all contributed to give the impression of a circus during the rehearsal of the gymnasts' or clowns' performance. Among

the clowns, His Royal Highness the Prince d'Axel, to whom the noble game of tennis had been recommended by the doctors to counteract his habitual state of coma, was one of the noisiest players. He had only arrived the previous day from a month spent at Nice at Colette's feet, and this game was his re-entry into Parisian life. He struck the ball each time with a "*han*" that seemed to proceed from a butcher-boy's lungs, and a display of muscles that would have excited admiration in a slaughter-house; when, at the very height of the game, he was informed that some one wanted to speak to him.

"Go to the devil!" answered the heir presumptive, without even turning his head.

The attendant insisted, and whispered a name in his Highness's ear, at which he calmed down and showed a certain astonishment.

"All right; ask him to wait; I will come directly this game is over."

When at last he went into one of the bath-rooms arranged round the gallery, furnished with bamboo seats and daintily hung with Japanese matting, he found his friend Rigolo sunk down on a divan looking the picture of dejection.

"Oh, my dear Prince, such an affair," began the ex-King of Illyria, raising a face that betrayed his extreme agitation.

He stopped at the sight of the servant laden

with towels and horsehair gloves who was preparing to sponge and curry his highness, streaming with perspiration like a Mecklenburg horse that has just reached the top of a hill. When the operation was over, Christian continued with pale, trembling lips :

“This is what has happened. You have heard of the adventure at the Family Hotel ? ”

His Highness turned his dull gaze on him and inquired : “ Caught ? ”

The king nodded affirmatively, and turned his handsome, shifty eyes aside. Then, after a pause, he resumed :

“ You can fancy the scene : the police coming in, in the middle of the night ; the girl crying, rolling on the ground, resisting the police, clinging to my knees : ‘ Monseigneur, Monseigneur, save me.’ I tried to make her hold her tongue ; too late. When I gave the first name I could think of, the police agent laughed in my face : ‘ It is useless ; my men have recognised you. You are the Prince d’Axel ! ’ ”

“ That’s good ! ” growled the prince from his basin, “ and then ? ”

“ By Jove ! my dear fellow, I was so taken aback, so surprised.... Other motives which I will also tell you.... In short, I let the man believe that I was you, being persuaded that the affair would not go any further. But nothing of the kind. They are

beginning to work it up, and as you might be called before the *Juge d'Instruction*, I have come to beg you——”

“To stand in the dock in your place?”

“Oh, it won't come to that. Only the newspapers are sure to get hold of it, names will be mentioned. And just now, with the royalist movement preparing in Illyria, our possible restoration, this scandal would have a most disastrous effect.”

Poor Rigolo presented a truly piteous appearance, as he stood awaiting his cousin d'Axel's decision while the latter silently combed his sparse yellow locks over his prematurely bald head. At last the royal prince condescended to speak :

“You really think the papers——?” then suddenly in his weak, sleepy ventriloquist voice he added : “Capital ; awfully funny ! My uncle will be in a fine rage when he hears of it !”

By this time he was dressed ; he took up his stick, stuck his hat on one side, and said : “Let us go and breakfast.” Arm in arm, they went across the *terrasse des Feuillants*, and got into Christian's phaeton that was waiting at the gates of the Tuilerie Gardens, wrapped themselves up in their furs, for it was a fine winter morning, illuminated by a cold rosy light, and the elegant equipage started off like the wind, bearing the inseparable pair towards the *café de Londres* ; Rigolo relieved and beaming, Queue-de-Poule less drowsy than usual,

exhilarated by his tennis and the thought of this last freak of which all Paris would believe him to be the hero. As they crossed the Place Vendôme, at this hour nearly deserted, a young and elegant woman holding a child by the hand, stopped at the edge of the pavement and seemed to be examining the numbers. His Royal Highness, who from his seat stared at all the women with the avidity of a townsman famished by three weeks of provincial life, caught sight of her and started: "Look Christian, how like——" But Christian did not hear him, his attention entirely absorbed by his mare, which was very frisky that morning; and when they turned round in the narrow carriage to look at the fair passer-by, she and her child had disappeared under the archway of one of the houses in the neighbourhood of the *Ministère de la Justice*.

The lady walked hurriedly, her veil down, hesitating and timid, as if going to a first rendez-vous; if, however, the sombre and somewhat too handsome dress and the mysterious gait were calculated to arouse suspicions, the name she inquired from the porter, the deep sadness of her voice when she pronounced it—the name of the most celebrated man in the medical world—dissipated all ideas of a love affair.

"Doctor Bouchereau?" replied the porter. "First floor, door facing the stairs. If you have not an appointment it is useless going up."

She did not answer, but dashed up the stairs, dragging the child after her, as though she were afraid of being recalled. On the first floor they told her the same thing: "If Madame did not send in her name yesterday—."

"I will wait," she said.

The servant did not insist, but led them first through an ante-room, crowded with people seated on the boxes where the firewood was kept, then through a second room likewise filled, and lastly he solemnly opened the door of a large drawing-room, which he closed immediately after the mother and child had entered as though to say: "You choose to wait; well, wait."

It was an immense room, very high, like all the first floors of the place Vendôme, sumptuously decorated with painted panels, wainscoting and ceiling. The sparse, old-fashioned crimson velvet furniture scattered about the room, the curtains and hangings of the same colour, and a few chairs and settees in worsted work, jarred with the surroundings. A chandelier in Louis XV. style hung over a small table dating from the First Empire, on the mantelpiece a common clock surmounted by a group stood between two candlesticks, and a complete absence of taste and of any artistic objects revealed the character of the modest, hard-working doctor who had suddenly become the fashion, and had made no efforts either

to attain or to retain it. And what renown it was ! It was, indeed, the renown that Paris alone can confer, extending to all classes, from the highest to the lowest strata of society, overflowing the provinces, foreign lands, all Europe in fact ; and this had already lasted ten years, without slackening, without diminishing, with the unanimous approbation of his colleagues, who admitted that this time, for once, success rewarded true merit, and not quackery in disguise. Bouchereau owed this fame, these extraordinary crowds of patients, less to his marvellous skill as an operator, his admirable lectures on anatomy, and his knowledge of the human frame, than to the light, the species of divination which guided him more clearly and more surely than the steel of his instruments ; and to the genial eye common to all great thinkers and poets, which endows science with a magical power of seeing into the very depths and beyond ! He was consulted like a Pythoness, with a blind, unreasoning faith. When he says, "It is nothing," the lame walk, the dying go away cured ; hence his popularity, the tyrannical pressure of the crowd, which gives this great man neither rest nor peace. Consulting physician to a large hospital, each morning he makes a long, slow, and minute examination of the patients, followed by an attentive escort of students, who watch the master as a god, wait on him, hand him his instruments, for

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Bouchereau never carries his case, but borrows from anyone at hand the instrument he may require, and as invariably forgets to return it. When he quits the hospital, he pays a few visits. Then returns quickly to his study, without stopping to snatch a mouthful, and at once begins his consultations, which last far into the evening.

That day, although it was but twelve o'clock, the drawing-room was already full of anxious, gloomy faces, seated round the walls, or grouped near the table, bending over the books and illustrated papers, and hardly turning when the door opened to note the fresh-comers, so absorbed is each one in himself and his ailments, so anxious are they to know what the oracle will say.

The silence of these patients is sinister, and their countenances furrowed with suffering lines, their dull, listless eyes are at times lighted up with cruel glances. The women still betray a kind of coquetry, some, indeed, wore a mask of haughtiness to hide their sufferings; but the men, torn away from their toil, from the physical activity of life, seem more depressed, more struck down and dejected. Among all this selfish misery, the mother and her little companion form a touching group; he looks so frail, so pale, with his little face void of expression and colour, in which only one eye seems alive; she, so motionless, transfixed by a terrible anxiety. One moment, weary with waiting, the

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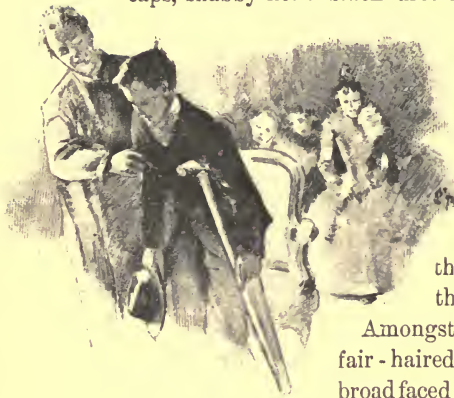
child rose to fetch an engraving or two on the table: with the timid, awkward movements of a cripple as he stretched out his arm he touched a patient, and received such an angered, ill-tempered look in return, that he went back to his place empty-handed, and remained there without stirring, his head bent on one side, in that uneasy attitude of a bird on a branch, so often seen in blind children.

These long hours of waiting at the door of the physician's study are like a suspension of life, a state of hypnotism, interrupted only by an occasional sigh, a cough, the rustling of a skirt, a smothered groan, or the ringing of the bell which at each moment heralds some fresh arrival. Sometimes the newcomer opens the door and as quickly shuts it again, horrified at finding the room so crowded, then, after a short colloquy and a slight remonstrance, he returns again, resigned to await his turn. No favour is ever shown at Bouchereau's. The only exceptions made are for any of the Parisian or country doctors when they themselves accompany their patient. These alone have the right to send in their card and pass in before their turn. They can be recognised by a certain familiar, authoritative air, as they pace nervously up and down the drawing-room, pulling out their watches, wondering that it is already past twelve, and that nothing as yet stirs in the physician's study. More and more people continue to pour in,

people of all classes, from the fat heavy banker who, in the early morning, has sent a servant to keep two chairs for him, down to the humble clerk, who says to himself : "Whatever it costs, I must consult Bouchereau." All kinds of costumes, all sorts of attire, fashionable bonnets, and linen caps, shabby little black dresses by the side of rich

satins ; but the same equality reigns in the reddened eyelids, the careworn brows, the anguish and sadness that haunt those who wait in the drawing-room of the great doctor.

Amongst the last comers, a fair-haired, tanned peasant, broad faced and wideshouldered, accompanies a small puny child who leans upon him on one side and on the other upon a crutch. The father takes touching precautions, bends his back, already arched with tilling the ground, under his new smock, and strives with his big fingers to handle and seat the child comfortably : "Are you comfortable like that?" he says. "Steady yourself ; wait, I'll put this cushion under you." He speaks in a loud tone, unmindful of the other people, and





disturbs everybody to get a chair or a stool. The child abashed, refined by his sufferings, remains silent, his whole body awry, holding his crutches between his legs. At last, when he is settled, the peasant begins to laugh, but there are tears in his eyes.

“Well! here we are! He is a wonderful man this doctor! You’ll see he will soon cure you.”

Then he smiles round at the company, a smile, however, that meets with nothing but an icy hardness on all faces. The lady in black, accompanied also by a child, alone looks at him kindly; and although she has a somewhat haughty air, he speaks to her, tells her his story; that his name is Raizou, market-gardener at Valenton, that his wife is almost always ailing, and that unfortunately their children take after her, and not after him, a strong, healthy man. The three eldest have died of a disease they had in the bones. The last one looked as if he were going to grow up all right, but a few months ago, his hip had got bad like the others. So they had put a mattrass in the cart and had come off to see Bouchereau.

He says all this quietly, in the slow, methodical manner of country folk, and while his neighbour listens kindly, the two little infirm children examine each other with curiosity, drawn together by their suffering, which throws, for the moment,

over the little fellow in his smock and woollen comforter, and the child wrapped up in rich furs, the same tinge of melancholy. A shiver suddenly runs through the assembled patients, faces redden, and all heads are turned towards a door behind which is heard a sound of steps, and of chairs scraping the floor as they are moved. The doctor is there, he has at last arrived. The steps draw nearer. On the threshold of the suddenly opened door appears a thick-set man of medium height, square shouldered, bald headed, with hard features. In a glance that meets all these anxious looks, his eyes run round the room and scrutinize all the new or old sufferers. Some one goes in with him and the door closes again. "He does not look very inviting," whispers Raizou, and to reassure himself, he looks at all the people who will pass in before him to the consulting room. A crowd indeed, and the weary hours of waiting are only broken by the slow, resounding strokes of an old provincial clock, ornamented by a figure of Polyhymnia, and the rare apparitions of the doctor. Each time he appears one turn is gained ; there is a movement, a little life in the room, and then once more everything resumes its dull, motionless aspect.

From the moment of her entry the mother has not spoken a word nor raised her veil, and there is something so imposing in her silence, perhaps in her mental prayer, that the peasant does not dare

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to address her again, but remains mute, and heaves deep sighs. At one moment he draws from his pocket, indeed, from the multitude of his pockets, a little bottle, a goblet, and a biscuit wrapped up in paper, that he carefully and slowly undoes to give a "sippet" to his boy. The child moistens his lips, and pushes aside the glass and biscuit: "No, no, I'm not hungry," and as he gazes at the poor worn out little face, Raizou thinks of his three eldest children, who, like this one, were never hungry. His eyes grow dim, his cheeks twitch nervously at this thought, and he says abruptly: "Don't move, my pet. I'll just go down and see if the cart is all right." How often he goes down to see if the cart is still waiting on the square, by the side of the pavement! And when he comes back smiling and beaming, he fancies that no one can notice his swollen, red eyes, and his cheeks purple from the rubbing and violent blows he has given them to drive back his tears.

The hours pass on slowly and sadly. In the drawing-room, which is getting dark, the faces appear paler, more anxious, more supplicatingly turned towards Bouchereau, as he impassively appears at regular intervals. The man from Valenton is in despair, as he begins to fear it will be night before they reach home again, that his wife will be anxious, and that the little one will catch cold. His concern is so great, and expressed

aloud with such touching simplicity, that, when after five mortal hours of expectation, the mother and child's turn is come, they give it up in favour of Raizou. "Oh, thank you, Madame." His effusiveness has not the time to become intruding, for the door has just opened. Quickly he catches up his son, gives him his crutch, so upset and confused that he does not see that the lady has slipped something into the hand of the poor cripple saying : "It is for you, for you."

Oh! how long both mother and child find this last waiting, made more dreary by the coming night and the apprehension that chills them to the heart. At last their turn has come, and they enter a large study, lighted by a tall, wide window, which opens on to the square, and which, notwithstanding the late hour, still admits a good deal of light. Bouchereau's table is placed in front,—a simple unornamented piece of furniture such as a country doctor or registrar might have. He sits down, the light at his back falling on the faces of the new comers ;—on the woman, whose uplifted veil reveals a youthful and energetic countenance, a brilliant complexion and eyes fatigued with constant watching, and on the little fellow who bends down his head as though the light in front were painful to him.

"What is the matter with the child?" inquires Bouchereau kindly, drawing the boy towards him

with a fatherly gesture ; for the rugged features conceal an exquisite tenderness that forty years' practice have not yet blunted. Before answering, the mother motions to the child to leave them, then, in a grave voice and foreign accent, she relates how her son had lost his right eye, a year ago, by accident. A short time ago some perturbations have been noticed in the left eye, the sight has become misty, with flashes every now and again, the visual power



seeming to decrease. To avoid complete blindness, she has been advised the extraction of the right eye. Is the operation feasible ? Is the child in a fit state to bear it ?

Bouchereau listens attentively, leaning forward in his arm-chair, his two keen eyes fixed on the scornful mouth, on the full blood-red lips, unsullied by any paint. Then, when the mother has finished all she has to say, he replies :

“The ablation that has been recommended,

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Madame, is of daily occurrence, and entirely devoid of danger, unless there are some exceptional circumstances in the case. Only once in the twenty years I practised at the hospital Lariboisière did I have a case that did not survive the operation. It is true that he was an old man, a rag-gatherer, badly fed, addicted to drink. Here the case is different. Your son does not look very strong, but his mother is a fine healthy woman, who has no doubt given him a good constitution. We shall soon ascertain this, however."

He called the child, placed him between his knees, and to occupy his attention while he examined him, asked him with a smile :

"What is your name?"

"Léopold, Monsieur."

"Léopold who?"

The child looks at his mother without answering.

"Well, Léopold, you must take off your jacket and waistcoat," continues the doctor; "I must examine and sound you all over."

The child slowly and awkwardly undresses, assisted by his mother's trembling hands, and by the fatherly old Bouchereau, who is more handy than either of them.

Oh! what a poor, puny, rickety little body, what narrow shoulders drawn in towards the flat chest, like the wings of a bird folded before its flight, and what flesh! so pallid, so bloodless, that the

scapulary and medals hanging from the neck stand out in the evening light as on a plaster *ex-voto* tablet. The mother casts down her eyes, as though ashamed of her child, while the physician sounds and listens, pausing occasionally to ask a question.

“The father is an old man, is he not?”

“No, Monsieur. About thirty-five years of age.”

“Often ill?”

“No, hardly ever.”

“All right; you may put on your clothes, my little man.”

He leans back in his great arm-chair thoughtfully, while the child, after having put on his blue velvet jacket and furs, goes back to his seat at the further end of the room without being told. For a year he has been surrounded by so much mystery, so many whispered conversations have been held around his sick bed, that he no longer minds them, no longer tries to understand, but abandons himself to his fate. Who, however, can describe the anguished look the mother casts upon the physician!

“Well, doctor?”

“Madame,” replies Bouchereau in a low voice, emphasizing each word, “your child is in truth threatened with the total loss of his sight. And yet—if he were my son—I would not operate upon him. Without quite understanding as yet his constitution, I notice such strange organic disorders, such a perturbation in his whole being,

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above all such worn-out, vitiated, impoverished blood——”

“Say royal blood !” exclaims Frédérique, abruptly rising in an outburst of indignation. She has a sudden recollection, a vision of the pale face of her little first-born lying in its tiny coffin covered with roses. Bouchereau also has risen, suddenly enlightened by these three words, and recognises in the woman before him the Queen of Illyria, whom he has never seen, as she goes nowhere, but whose portraits are in every shop window :

“Oh, Madame, had I known——”

“Do not apologize,” says Frédérique, already calmer.

“I came here to hear the truth — that truth we never hear, even in exile. Ah ! Monsieur Bouchereau, how unhappy queens are ! To think that everybody is persecuting me to allow my child to be operated upon ! And yet they know his life is at stake ! But State reasons ! In a month, perhaps in a fortnight, or sooner even, the Diets of Illyria will be sending a deputation. They want to be able to show them a king. As he is at present, he might do ; but blind ! Nobody will have him. Therefore, at the risk of killing him, he must be operated upon ! Reign or die ! And I had almost become accomplice of this crime. My poor little Zara ! My God, what matter if he reigns or not ! Let him live, my child, let him live !”



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Five o'clock ! The night is closing in. In the Rue de Rivoli, crowded by the carriages returning from the Bois de Boulogne and the approaching hour of dinner, the vehicles slowly follow each other along the side of the Tuileries iron railings, which, lighted by the quickly setting sun, seems to cast long dark iron bars over the passers-by. On the side of the Arc de Triomphe the sky is still bathed in a red boreal light, while in the opposite direction it is of a dark mourning violet, thickened and shaded black at the edges. It is in this direction that the heavy carriage with the Illyrian arms on its panels rolls off. At the turn of the Rue de Castiglione the queen suddenly catches sight of the Hotel des Pyramides and remembers all the illusions of her first arrival in Paris, singing and surging like the music of the brass band that resounded on that day through the dense foliage. Since then, what deceptions ! what struggles ! Now it is all over, quite over. The royal race is ended. A deathlike chill falls upon her shoulders as the carriage plunges deeper into the shadow, ever going deeper into gloom. She does not therefore see the tender, timid, imploring look that the child turns towards her.

“Mamma, if I am not a king any more will you love me just the same ?”

“Oh ! my darling !”

She passionately grasps the little hand out-

stretched towards hers. The sacrifice is made! Warmed and comforted by that clasp, Frédérique becomes nothing but a mother, and while the Tuileries, their solid ashes gilded by a ray of the setting sun, rise suddenly before her as though to recall the past, she gazes at them without emotion, without a remembrance, looking at them as at some ancient monument of Assyria or Egypt—mute witness of men and manners long since disappeared—some grand old thing—now dead.



Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & CO.
Edinburgh and London

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



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